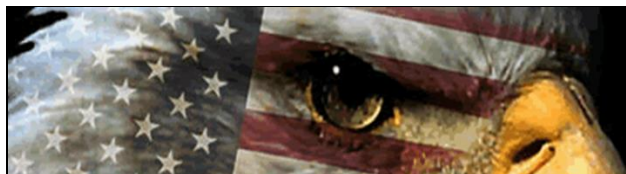



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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	05/11 Ukraine key gains in northeast
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/05/11/ukraine-russia-war-natural-gas-kharkiv/5431652266006/

GIST	<p>May 11 (UPI) -- Ukrainian officials said Wednesday that they have shut down Russian supplies of natural gas that flow through a Ukraine hub to other European countries, as military officials said they have made some gains in the northeast.</p> <p>Ukraine said it halted supplies of gas at a critical hub mainly because of interference from Moscow. Officials said the gas, however, would be rerouted through areas controlled by Ukraine.</p> <p>It wasn't immediately known what the impact would be, but it comes as the fighting in Ukraine has interrupted world energy markets.</p> <p>Russia, a major supplier of natural gas and petroleum, has faced sanctions and export bans from multiple countries -- including the United States -- in the weeks since it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Ukrainian military officials said Wednesday that forces have made some strategic gains in northeastern Ukraine.</p> <p>A military chief in Oleh Sinegubiv in the Kharkiv region said Ukrainian forces have been successful in pushing out Russian troops, but have also discovered an extensive network of land mines.</p> <p>"The enemy completely mined everything," Sinegubiv said, according to NBC News, adding that schools and private homes in the area had also been mined.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Wednesday that Ukrainian forces scored new victories and recaptured four villages near Kharkiv.</p> <p>Officials in Moscow said that Russian forces struck close to 100 objects in Ukraine early Wednesday, including two command posts and three ammunition depots. Russia also said air defense systems destroyed several unmanned Ukrainian aerial vehicles.</p> <p>Ukraine's health ministry said Russian troops raided hospitals in the eastern town of Kreminna looking for equipment.</p> <p>"The Russians were shocked by the equipment of our hospitals, so they did not delay and in the first days of the occupation began to dismantle the equipment and transport it to Luhansk or Russia," Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai said, according to NBC News.</p> <p>There has been fighting in the Kharkiv region virtually since the Russian invasion began in February and the city, Ukraine's second-largest, was under Russian control for weeks. Officials said earlier this week that dozens of bodies were found in a residential building in nearby Izyum after Russian troops left.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 China wheat harvest uncertain
SOURCE	https://dnyuz.com/2022/05/11/war-and-weather-sent-food-prices-soaring-now-chinas-harvest-is-uncertain/
GIST	<p>PINGGU, China — From village to village, the wheat crops in China have been inconsistent this season.</p> <p>One field on the flat plains east of Beijing was patchy, with knee-high emerald stalks in some spots while almost bald elsewhere, damaged by the torrential rains of last autumn. The next village over, a luxurious wheat crop was thriving after this spring's bright sunshine and slow, soaking rains.</p> <p>China's winter wheat harvest next month is one of the big uncertainties in a global economy already struggling with high commodity prices, particularly in regions heavily dependent on crops from Russia and Ukraine. If the Chinese harvest is bad in the coming weeks, it could drive food prices up further, compounding hunger and poverty in the world's poorest countries.</p> <p>Global food prices have already climbed sharply, with wheat up nearly 80 percent since July.</p>

It has been a perfect storm of war and weather.

Russia's invasion, including a blockade of ports, has disrupted supplies from Ukraine, a leading grain exporter long known as Europe's breadbasket. The United Nations World Food Program called last week for the immediate reopening of Ukrainian ports, "before the current global hunger crisis spins out of control."

Energy prices have been rising since before the war, prompting many fertilizer producers to slow or close their factories. As fertilizer costs soar, many farmers around the world are using less, contributing to smaller harvests.

Poor weather has added to the challenges. It has been scorchingly hot this spring in India, a large wheat exporter, while drought has hurt the crops in the southern Great Plains of the United States and in East Africa.

It has been a double blow for East African nations, including Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia, which are heavily dependent on Russia and Ukraine for the bulk of their wheat imports. Bread prices have doubled in some areas. The World Food Program warned last Friday, "44 million people around the world are marching toward starvation."

China, the world's largest producer and consumer of wheat, is the next pressure point for prices.

Deluges last autumn left the soil so waterlogged that the wheat roots could not easily penetrate it, said Ren Ruixia, a 45-year-old farmhand, as she surveyed a wheat field that looked like it had a bad haircut. Coronavirus lockdowns also delayed the arrival of fertilizer, she said.

"Right now, it seems that the harvest is definitely affected," Ms. Ren said in late April. "But it also depends on the weather next month — how much rain we have."

The adequacy of food supplies has long been a top issue in China, where tens of millions of people died of famine in the early 1960s during Mao's disastrous agricultural experiments. Stringently enforced rules require that a large share of the country's acreage — 463,000 square miles, larger than Texas — be farmed. Rural villages are sometimes bulldozed to maintain the national target for acres under cultivation.

Xi Jinping, China's top leader, has made food security a paramount focus, notably when commodities became a trade issue with the United States during the Trump administration.

"In the future, the demand for food will continue to increase, and the balance between supply and demand will become tighter and tighter," he warned in a policy speech published March 31 in Qiushi, the Chinese Communist Party's leading theoretical journal. "In addition, the international situation is complicated and severe, and we must always be on high alert to ensure food security."

China's agriculture minister, Tang Renjian, stirred international concern in early March when he said the wheat crop would be the worst on record because of the deluge last fall. Other agriculture ministry officials have issued warnings, although not quite as downbeat.

Western experts analyzing satellite photos of the Chinese crop have generally been less worried than Chinese officials. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated last month that China's wheat crop would be 3 percent smaller than last year's.

"I don't think it's going to be a disaster, but I don't think it is a normal crop, either," said Darin Friedrichs, a founder and market research director at Sitonia Consulting, a Shanghai commodities analysis firm.

Top Chinese officials have issued pessimistic warnings in the past, notably in 2011, to make sure lower-level officials pay close attention to the harvest. A global food shortage may be making Chinese officials especially cautious this year.

China has a sizable stockpile of wheat for emergencies. But some of the wheat may be fit only for animal consumption given the poor storage, said Joseph W. Glauber, a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington.

“The international situation is complicated and severe, and we must always be on high alert to ensure food security — we’d rather produce more and increase reserves,” Mr. Xi said in the remarks issued at the end of March.

The coronavirus is complicating matters. Lockdowns this spring have disrupted farming in big agricultural areas like Jilin Province. And many families, barred from leaving their apartments to go grocery shopping, have struggled to find enough food.

Some people have been stockpiling, worried they might face the same lockdown restrictions. Cai Wenling, a 43-year-old resident of Chongqing, said she had bought four gallons of rapeseed oil, nearly 100 bottles of mineral water, four weeks’ worth of milk and so much pork, beef and chicken that her refrigerator and freezer were full. She still plans to buy another 110 pounds of rice.

“Although I stocked up, I still feel confident in Chongqing’s epidemic prevention.” Ms. Cai said, “For middle-aged people like us, we would be more conservative when we consider things. We have the confidence, but preparedness averts peril.”

China’s nervousness about its food stocks could ripple through the global supply chain.

China has the world’s largest foreign currency reserves, so it has the ability to buy as much wheat as it needs in world markets. But doing so could push the price of wheat even higher, making it unaffordable in many poor countries.

China’s next move will come down to the harvest.

In villages around Pinggu, wheat farmers gave varying assessments. Much depends on how well drained their fields are, but everyone agreed that the rain last autumn had been remarkable.

The rain came down in torrents week after week in the wheat belt of China, drowning hundreds of people in tunnels and along riverbanks. In Pingyao, the centuries-old city walls, made with mud cores, collapsed after they became sodden last fall.

Zhang Dewang, a 69-year-old resident of the village of Daxingzhuang, west of Pinggu, said the wheat in his family’s field was growing quite well. The crop was planted unusually late, after the autumnal equinox, the traditional last day of planting in the area.

But in recent years the weather has been staying warm later, Mr. Zhang said, so the wheat has a chance to germinate before winter frosts force it into dormancy.

“The wheat is growing so well,” he said. “It’s coming along great.”

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HEADLINE	05/11 Inflation stays hot, barrels ahead 8.3%
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/05/11/cpi-april-2022.html
GIST	<p>Inflation rose again in April, continuing a climb that has pushed consumers to the brink and is threatening the economic expansion, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Wednesday.</p> <p>The consumer price index, a broad-based measure of prices for goods and services, increased 8.3% from a year ago, higher than the Dow Jones estimate for an 8.1% gain.</p>

	<p>Removing volatile food and energy prices, so-called core CPI still rose 6.2%, against expectations for a 6% gain.</p> <p>Inflation has been the single biggest threat to a recovery that began early in the pandemic and saw the economy in 2021 stage its biggest single-year growth level since 1984. Rising prices at the pump and in grocery stores have been one problem, but inflation has spread beyond those two areas into housing, auto sales and a host of other areas.</p> <p>Federal Reserve officials have responded to the problem with two interest rate hikes so far this year and pledges of more until inflation comes down to the central bank's 2% goal. However, Wednesday's data shows that the Fed has a big job ahead.</p> <p>The month-over-month gains also were higher than expectations — 0.3% on headline CPI vs. the 0.2% estimate and a 0.6% increase for core, against the outlook for a 0.4% gain.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 US airline passengers aren't happy
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/jd-power-2022-north-american-airline-satisfaction-survey-results/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN) — The airports are crowded, the flights are packed and air travel in the US is back in full swing. But the return to the skies in the wake of the pandemic hasn't been entirely smooth: passengers seem more badly behaved than ever, flight cancellations feel increasingly commonplace and airlines are hiking fares as fuel prices soar.</p> <p>Perhaps it's no surprise that US airplane passenger satisfaction is declining across the board, at least according to consumer research company J.D. Power's 2022 North American Airline Satisfaction Study.</p> <p>J.D. Power's report suggests that customers are frustrated by ticket cost, flight crew performance and even the aircraft they're traveling on -- and that's true whether they opt to travel economy, premium economy or business.</p> <p>The study finds overall US airline passenger satisfaction at 798 out of 1,000, down over 20 points from last year's report.</p> <p>Still, certain airlines have come out on top in the report. Economy passengers rated Southwest Airlines highest with 849 points, while JetBlue triumphed in premium economy (851 points) and first/business (878 points).</p> <p>Michael Taylor, travel intelligence lead at J.D. Power, said the overall decline in US passenger satisfaction isn't "bad news," suggesting airlines could learn from the results to improve their offerings.</p> <p>"If airlines can find ways to manage these growing volumes while making some small adjustments to help passengers feel more valued, they should be able to manage this return to 'normal,'" said Taylor in a statement.</p> <p>A new era of flying</p> <p>Last year's North American Airline Satisfaction Study results indicated US travelers were enjoying some of the unexpected benefits of pandemic-era flights: fewer passengers, emptier flights and ticket flexibility.</p> <p>Taylor suggested that the comparison between those height-of-Covid flights and travel today was behind this year's drop in satisfaction.</p> <p>"Fewer passengers meant more space on airplanes, less waiting in line and more attention from flight attendants. But that business model was simply not sustainable," he said.</p>

Some carriers, like American Airlines, only resumed selling alcohol on board recently. Limited beverage offerings could be reason for customer dissatisfaction, according to J.D. Power.

Equally, the report suggests there are some leftovers from pandemic flying that passengers would rather see the back of. J.D. Power draws a link between a decrease in food and beverage satisfaction in premium economy and business and the fact that many airlines didn't serve alcohol on board for much of last year.

As well as food and beverage options, the North America Airline Satisfaction Study also examined how happy passengers were with aircraft, baggage, boarding, check-in, cost and fees, flight crew, in-flight services and reservations.

Some 7,004 US airplane passengers were surveyed from March 2021 through March 2022.

J.D. Power's top US airlines for economy passengers

1. Southwest Airlines
2. JetBlue Airways
3. Delta Air Lines
4. Allegiant Air
5. Alaska Airlines
6. Air Canada
7. United Airlines
8. Spirit Airlines
9. American Airlines
10. Frontier Airlines
11. WestJet

J.D. Power's top US airlines for premium economy passengers

1. JetBlue Airways
2. Delta Air Lines
3. Alaska Airlines
4. American Airlines
5. United Airlines
6. Air Canada

J.D. Power's top US airlines for first/business passengers

1. JetBlue Airways
2. Alaska Airlines
3. Delta Air Lines
4. Air Canada
5. United Airlines
6. American Airlines

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HEADLINE	05/10 CDC: new subvariant cases rising
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2022-05-10/cdc-new-omicron-subvariant-ba-2-12-1-responsible-for-43-of-coronavirus-cases
GIST	<p>Cases of a highly transmissible omicron subvariant are growing in the U.S., according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p> <p>While BA.2, or “stealth omicron,” remains the dominant omicron subvariant circulating, cases of BA.2.12.1 are substantially increasing, up from 33% of coronavirus cases two weeks ago to nearly 43% of infections last week, according to CDC data published Tuesday.</p>

And in some areas, BA.2.12.1 has already become the dominant subvariant. In the CDC region that includes New York and New Jersey, the strain is responsible for 66% of cases. New York state first [sounded](#) the alarm over BA.2.12.1 in mid-April.

Experts believe BA.2.12.1 to be about 25% more transmissible than BA.2, so it is likely contributing to the increase in coronavirus cases seen nationally.

The U.S. is averaging over 66,000 new cases of the coronavirus each day, which is up from a daily average of 29,000 a month ago.

Despite increasing infections, states and cities have not reimplemented mitigation measures like mask-wearing. Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have also been increasing over the past month, while average deaths seem to be holding steady at over 300 per day.

Experts don't expect BA.2.12.1 to be any more severe than BA.2, though studies are ongoing.

"Additional evaluation is currently underway to understand the impact of BA.2.12.1 on vaccine effectiveness," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky recently said. "But importantly, we continue to believe that those who are vaccinated and especially those who are boosted, continue to have strong protection against severe disease, even from BA.2.12.1."

Other highly transmissible omicron subvariants circulating globally haven't yet made inroads in the U.S., including BA.4 and BA.5, which have caused an increase in coronavirus cases in South Africa.

While that may sound like good news for now, it is unclear how those subvariants will spread in the future.

"Many countries have had different types of circulation of different sublineages," Maria Van Kerkhove of the World Health Organization said at a briefing on Tuesday. "What we don't quite know yet is what will happen in countries that have a substantial wave of BA.2. Will they see the same growth advantage we see in increasing cases of BA.4 and BA.5?"

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HEADLINE	05/10 Domestic fears drive Putin's war planning
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-05-10/domestic-concerns-stopped-putin-from-declaring-war-on-ukraine-analysts
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision not to declare war on Ukraine at the high-profile Victory Day celebrations he oversaw in Moscow this week was made amid concerns that the security of his regime rests at least in part on how he handles the war in Ukraine and amid growing fears that missteps could unravel his domestic power, a new analysis suggests.</p> <p>Though he was verbose on Russia's military power and comparisons between the current regime in Kyiv and Nazi Germany – whose defeat serves as the central focus of annual celebrations on May 9 – Putin fell short of unleashing the full might of Russia's military on the former Soviet state, as many Western officials and analysts believed he would. In doing so, he also declined to ask anything more of the Russian people at a time central tenets of his war campaign have stalled while others have begun to unravel.</p> <p>"Putin implicitly reassured the Russian population that he would not ask them for a greater commitment to the war effort," the Institute for the Study of War concluded in a note released late Monday. "Putin likely calculates that he cannot ask the Russian people to mobilize without triggering a destabilizing backlash against his regime."</p> <p>The institute notes some indications that the current state of the war in Ukraine has affected how the Russian population views the preemptive invasion Putin ordered in February. Early indications suggested near unanimous support and shared sense that the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posed some sort of direct threat to Moscow.</p>

Though 80% still support the war, only 50% strongly support it, with nearly a third feeling “anxiety, fear and horror” related to the invasion, according to polling in mid-April from the Levada Center, a Russia-based independent social research firm.

“Western sanctions will likely increasingly impact Russian citizens in the coming months, limiting the enthusiasm of the general population to make greater sacrifices for the war effort,” according to the analysis. “Putin likely also faces internal discontent from Russian elites and security forces, and the war has degraded the military that would defend his regime from large-scale domestic unrest.

“Putin likely factored these calculations into his decision to pursue a steady-state approach to the war, rather than an escalatory mobilization.”

The Russian leader may not have sought to expand his country’s involvement in the war without clear cause, he also indicated Monday that he had no intention of backing away from the fight. Following the parade, Putin met with the father of a Russian commander known for particular brutality against Ukrainian military captives who died fighting in the Donbas, the embattled easternmost region of Ukraine, and pledged that he would continue his war.

Ukraine did not leave Russia any other opportunity but to fight, Putin claimed, furthering his groundless assertion that Kyiv provoked the Kremlin into conflict. Russia’s soldiers are fighting “courageously, heroically, professionally,” he added, according to a translation of his remarks, before stressing, “All the plans are being fulfilled. A result will be achieved. There are no doubts about this.”

Western officials, however, counter with other battlefield assessments that show Russia’s forces have created problems for themselves by continually extending their lines beyond what their logisticians can handle, all under the command of unprepared general officers. Ukraine’s armed forces have also proven more effective on the battlefield than most appeared to expect, both in the Kremlin and in Western capitals, due in part to the steady flows of weapons from partner countries.

British military intelligence reported this week that at least one of Russia’s most advanced battle tanks, the T-90M, had been destroyed despite its upgraded armor and ability to defend against anti-tank weapons. It also noted that Russian generals and other senior officers continue to be compelled to move to the front lines due to “difficulties in command and control, as well as faltering Russian performance.” At least a dozen Russian generals have died in 75 days of fighting.

“The Russians just have not been able to make any significant progress at all,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters on Monday when asked about the fighting in eastern Ukraine, a region known as the Donbas. He particularly noted Ukrainian troops’ ability to counter Russian artillery with strikes of their own.

“It’s helped by the weather. It’s very muddy there so they are pretty much restricted to paved roads,” he said, adding, “They haven’t fixed all their logistics and sustainment issues, we still see them struggling to resupply their troops.”

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HEADLINE	05/10 Judge tosses businesses CHOP lawsuit
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3466432/city-seattle-chop-lawsuit-class-action-certification/
GIST	<p>A U.S. District Court judge has denied class action certification to the group of Capitol Hill property owners suing the City of Seattle over alleged endorsement of the Capitol Hill Organized Protest (CHOP) — the area around Cal Anderson Park that was abandoned by the East Precinct following protests over the murder of George Floyd.</p> <p>Plaintiffs in the case are business and property owners in the 16-block portion of Capitol Hil formerly enveloped by CHOP, alleging that the City “actively endorsed, enabled, and encouraged the occupation,” the judge’s order reads.</p>

	<p>Following SPD's departure from the area, the property owners cite deteriorating health and safety conditions in Capitol Hill between June and July 2020: two fatal shootings, rape, robbery, and obstruction of vehicle access using the concrete barriers SPD left behind were reported in the area.</p> <p>That increase in crime culminated in SPD's designation of CHOP as a "red zone," meaning dispatch was limited to high casualty events, for example, mass shootings.</p> <p>Plaintiffs allege that they suffered numerous economic and non-economic injuries as a result of the City's actions, including reduced property values, extensive property damage, reduced access to emergency services, public safety dangers, exposure to excessive noise, and an inability to use and access their properties.</p> <p>The plaintiffs ultimately failed to meet several criteria to reach class-action certification. A commonality within the judge's reasoning was the differences among the accusations and damage descriptions the individual plaintiffs are leveling against the City.</p> <p>For example, not every business involved in the lawsuit was open during CHOP's existence. Unicorn was closed due to COVID at the time, and the City, according to the defense's oral arguments, will argue that the damages the business incurred were related to the closure, not CHOP.</p> <p>With the judge's denial, the 17 plaintiffs will now file a joint status report to identify the next steps for case management.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Natural gas prices rise in Europe
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/natural-gas-prices-rise-in-europe-after-ukraine-cuts-flows-11652255011?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>Natural-gas prices in Europe increased Wednesday after Ukraine said it would reduce flows from Russia through its territory, blaming interference by Russian forces with pipelines in the east of the country.</p> <p>Futures for natural gas in the Netherlands, Europe's benchmark for a fuel widely used in home heating, industrial processes and power generation, rose 5.4% to 98.80 euros, equivalent to \$104.21, a megawatt-hour.</p> <p>Europe has been shoring up its energy supplies ahead of a planned European Union-wide embargo on Russian oil, being hashed out this week. Some member states, especially Germany, have also scrambled to find alternative supplies of gas amid the threat of a potential severing of gas exports by Moscow. Despite these moves, Europe is still heavily reliant on Russian gas, a slug of which flows through Ukraine.</p> <p>A spokeswoman for Gazprom PJSC, Russia's giant gas supplier, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.</p> <p>The Gas TSO of Ukraine, which runs the country's pipeline network, said Tuesday it would halt gas flowing through a transit point in the Luhansk region of Donbas that accounted for about a third of Russian gas exports to Europe through Ukraine. The company said Russian forces had interfered with technical processes at key pipeline infrastructure, including by siphoning off gas.</p> <p>Russia is pursuing a strategy to seize the entire Donbas area of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>The pipeline operator said more gas could flow through the separate Sudzha transit point to offset the drop in flows.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Cruise bookings hit record despite Covid
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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/05/10/cruises-booking-covid-outbreaks/
GIST	<p>Linda Klauschie, 68, was ready last month to take her first cruise since 2019 — but she also assumed her ship would probably have coronavirus cases on board.</p> <p>So Klauschie, a retired mental health counselor from Albuquerque who is vaccinated and double-boosted, took precautions: She wore a KN95 mask to fly to and from New Orleans, where her back-to-back week-long cruises on the Carnival Glory started. She skipped the buffet when lines were long, kept a distance from other passengers whenever possible, wore a mask during shows and spent a lot of time taking the stairs.</p> <p>“I took the elevator, in two weeks, all of three times,” she said. “Luckily I’ve been doing aerobics ... so it didn’t kill me.”</p> <p>Passengers such as Klauschie — as well as some newcomers — are fueling the U.S. cruise recovery after a 15-month shutdown. Nearly a year after sailings from North America restarted, three of the world’s largest cruise lines will have their full fleets in service as of next week. And some cruise giants have reported record-breaking bookings.</p> <p>But even as the cruise comeback gains momentum, the coronavirus remains a stubborn reality. While case numbers are far from the highs seen during the surge of the omicron variant, the majority of ships sailing in U.S. waters are under investigation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention because of coronavirus outbreaks.</p> <p>According to data updated Friday, the CDC’s cruise ship status report shows that 76 of 92 ships have reported cases of the coronavirus on board. Of those, 11 were below the threshold for a CDC investigation, which is triggered when cases are reported in 0.3 percent or more of total passengers and crew. That means 65 ships met the requirements to trigger an investigation.</p> <p>By comparison, in early January, all 92 passenger-carrying ships in U.S. waters had met the threshold for investigation. The CDC warned all passengers to avoid cruise ships in late December amid the omicron spike, but it removed all warnings in late March.</p> <p>Public health experts have warned that cruise ships are especially vulnerable to the spread of the disease because of the large number of people gathered in tight quarters over a sustained period of time.</p> <p>“Cruise travel will always pose risk, and vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself against COVID-19, including severe illness, hospitalization, and death,” the CDC’s website says.</p> <p>Some passengers are experiencing that risk firsthand, news reports show: Some passengers who tested positive during a Panama Canal sailing on a Carnival ship had to isolate in their rooms and in Seattle hotels at the end of the trip. One Princess Cruises ship that has visited Alaska and Hawaii had 253 cases across multiple sailings between late March and late April, public health officials said.</p> <p>Major cruise lines require passengers to be vaccinated, with rare exceptions, and to test negative before a cruise. The CDC considers a ship “highly vaccinated” if 90 percent of passengers are immunized — a recent change from 95 percent. While pandemic-era public health rules, including vaccination and testing requirements, are now recommendations, cruise lines have agreed to voluntarily follow them.</p> <p>Because of those protocols, many passengers say they are comfortable with the risk.</p> <p>“I think we’ve gotten to the point where no one expects that they’ll go anywhere and be perfectly insulated from covid,” said Colleen McDaniel, editor in chief of the cruise news and review site Cruise Critic. “I think people are making life decisions with that in mind: ‘What level am I willing to submit myself to?’”</p> <p>She said that during the pandemic, readers of the site — a pro-cruise crowd — reported that they felt more comfortable on a cruise ship than on a plane or at a grocery store or indoor wedding. And, she said, the</p>

message boards where travelers talk about hot topics of the day are more often focusing on pre-covid concerns.

“I think that’s a good sign that, hey, this sort of feels more normal,” she said. “They are concerned about dress code and that kind of thing.”

Brandon Davis, 39, lives in a town in northern Georgia where, last he heard, fewer than 40 percent of people are vaccinated. So boarding the Carnival Mardi Gras late last month in Florida’s Port Canaveral with a vaccination rate of at least 95 percent was a change of pace.

“I felt safer on the ship than I do at home,” said Davis, who is vaccinated and boosted.

Davis, who had last taken a cruise in October, said he was a little stressed about the pre-cruise testing despite being cautious in the week leading up to the trip. But he also felt safer knowing everyone who boarded with him had gotten a negative result.

“I know it’s for the greater good,” he said.

And the cruise — his 24th — was very good. On Twitter, he described the trip as “absolutely epic” and raved about the food, the ship’s layout, the excursions and the activities.

“It was the best ship I’ve ever been on,” said Davis, who works in his family’s carpet-manufacturing business.

He paid some attention to news about outbreaks before the trip. Once on board, he avoided elevators and some crowded areas, and he limited conversations outside his party. But ultimately, he decided: “Life goes on.”

As more of the world takes a living-with-the-virus approach and travel restrictions fall globally, cruise passengers appear to be adopting a similar approach, said Pam Young, executive vice president of partner relations at Internova Travel Group. She said the omicron wave in December and January had a “serious impact” on bookings, but that started to ease by the end of February and March.

“Now we’re kind of getting back to normalcy where we can choose where we can go, the world is open to us,” she said. “Everyone’s jumping on board.”

Natasha Arney, 25, canceled her planned cruise in 2021. But after her in-laws took a cruise and described the protocols, she booked a trip for her twins’ 2nd birthday in February 2023.

“If they’re taking it that serious, we are going,” said Arney, who cares for her children and works as a dog groomer. “I need a vacation.”

She is most looking forward to leaving her home in Southern Maryland and having “other people preparing my meals for me.” Also: not having to clean.

Vaccinated and boosted herself, Arney is hopeful a vaccine will be available for children under 5 before the trip. She said she is not keeping track of coronavirus cases on cruise ships or the CDC’s reporting, but she will start paying more attention in November and December.

“If we feel like we need to cancel or move it, we will,” she said.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Ukraine war a boon for US-made weapons
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjbyaq/biden-ukraine-us-lockheed-missiles
GIST	President Joe Biden visited a Lockheed Martin weapons factory in Alabama last week, in a show of support for the defense industry that his administration is relying on to help arm Ukraine against Russia.

Since the war began in late February, the controversial defense sector has benefited from U.S. weapons transfers to Ukraine, seeing a surge in stock valuations as investors view it as a good bet in the coming months and years. While it's common knowledge the arms trade benefits from major global conflicts, top brands like Lockheed, the largest arms maker in the world, and Raytheon Technologies say supply chain issues have hampered production and the new government money has yet to truly reflect in their earnings. ([Reports](#) have already pushed back on those claims as NATO governments and their allies look set to spend big on military goods and point out the defense industry is now experiencing the same spike in growth as with regional wars of the past.)

Several American-made products have been game-changers on the battlefield in Ukraine and are partially credited for allowing the smaller Ukrainian military to repel the invading Russian forces. In particular, Raytheon Technologies' Stinger anti-aircraft systems and Lockheed Martin's anti-tank Javelins (which it partly makes with Raytheon) enjoy cult-like status in Ukraine as [holy weapons](#).

"You know, some of the best, most effective weapons in our arsenal is the Javelin," Biden said at the Lockheed Martin plant to workers making the anti-tank missile launchers, standing at a podium with Javelins sitting in the background. "Missiles like the ones manufactured right here by our country are highly portable, extremely effective against a wide range of armored targets and can hit targets up to 400 meters away and have a fire and forget capability."

The president told the Lockheed Martin workers that they were at the forefront of a battle between global autocracies like China and Russia, and democratic countries like the U.S. and its allies.

"You're making it possible for the Ukrainian people to defend themselves without us having to risk [entering] a third world war by sending American soldiers fighting [against] Russian soldiers," he said.

Biden, who's [been criticized for being too cozy with the defense industry](#), announced weeks ago that he is asking Congress to green-light a \$33 billion package of military, humanitarian, and economic assistance for the government of Ukraine. That package earmarked billions of dollars worth of weapons for Ukraine (some from Pentagon stockpiles that will need to be replaced), and is likely very welcome news to the defense sector. The aerospace and defense trade, though, had a "down" year in 2020, [as revenue dropped to a still-staggering \\$874 billion](#), according to industry figures.

Dan Grazier, a senior defense policy fellow at the federal government watchdog [Project on Government Oversight](#) (POGO), said that despite some of their downplaying, big arms companies look at the war in Ukraine as a conflict that will boost their sales, directly or indirectly.

"This is a kind of well-known phenomena about how when war starts there's plenty of people that it's going to make a lot of money," Grazier said, explaining that the defense industry was already reeling from the Afghanistan war pullout and a new conflict in Europe could be seen as a cash injection.

"The Ukraine war kind of came at a good time (for the arms industry)," Grazier said. "In August when the Afghanistan war ended, when you had some of the CEOs of defense contractors lamenting the fact that the war ended and they were expecting a hit to their bottom line... when the [Ukraine war] started, there were people there almost eagerly anticipating it—you know, big, big profits."

While Congress slowly rolls out spending plans and contracting to support Ukraine, the emboldened Russian threat and the war in general has caused a chain reaction sure to profit American defense contractors: Germany will for the first time in decades [majorly spend on its military](#), while countries neighboring Ukraine, like Poland, have already signed new deals for U.S.-made [heavy weapons and tanks](#).

This is all coming within the mere opening months of the conflict, which many expect to last and may even [spill into other theaters of war](#) throughout 2022.

On a [CNBC news show](#) in late January, Raytheon Technologies CEO Greg Hayes was already projecting a Russian invasion of Ukraine could see his company benefit by arming NATO and its allies in the fight.

“Obviously we have some defensive weapons systems that we could supply, which could be helpful,” Hayes said. “One of our core missions is about supporting the warfighter and helping our allies and country defend democracy. We’ve got the technologies to help in these engagements.” Then in April he told investors on an [earnings call](#) that his company expected \$750 million less in revenue since sanctions prevented Raytheon from selling to the Kremlin. But that was only one piece of bad news, erased by the fact the company [upgraded its earning expectations to \\$68 billion](#) (up 6 percent since the war started).

So far the gargantuan Biden spending package, which is already experiencing [some resistance](#) from the historically-hawkish-on-Russia GOP, has not allowed the defense sector to completely avoid the last few weeks of market instability (stock prices for [Lockheed Martin and Raytheon](#) are both down slightly from spring highs). But even more contracts are on the horizon as the Pentagon has put out a formal [request to all weapons-makers](#) it needs help to fulfill its mission to supply Ukraine with arms. And despite the last few turbulent weeks on the market, stock prices for many defense companies (including Lockheed and Raytheon) are well above pre-war levels.

The Biden administration is aware that sending large percentages of the Pentagon weapons stockpile to Ukraine will also require some replacements, which the weapons industry will no doubt, eagerly fulfill. On Sunday, in another sign that business from the new war can’t be that unprofitable, Lockheed Martin CEO James Taiclet [told Reuters](#) in an interview that his company will nearly double its annual production of the Javelin from over 2,000 to north of 4,000 per year (which may take them several years). Taiclet also said he expected demands for those types of systems to increase globally, citing the threats of Russia and China, with rival countries arming up with the kinds of weapons Ukraine has already used to great success against a much larger foe.

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HEADLINE	05/11 China intolerant: WHO chief censored
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkpn98/who-chief-tedros-censored-zero-covid-unsustainable
GIST	<p>China’s zero-tolerance mindset to COVID-19 appears to be extending to even just criticism of its pandemic policy, signaling the country’s intent to uphold some of the world’s harshest measures to contain the coronavirus despite growing economic and social costs.</p> <p>The country’s internet censors have removed comments critical of China’s “zero COVID” approach, including remarks from the WHO chief that the country’s absolutist pandemic policy isn’t sustainable.</p> <p>Video clips of WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus’s Tuesday remarks calling for a change in strategy have been largely scrubbed off the Chinese internet. Screenshots of foreign media reports on his comments were also blocked on Chinese social media.</p> <p>“When we talk about the zero COVID strategy, we don’t think that is sustainable, considering the behavior of the virus now and what we anticipate in the future,” Tedros said in a press briefing on Tuesday. The UN agency has discussed this with Chinese experts, he added.</p> <p>“Especially when we now have a good knowledge and understanding of the virus and we have good tools to use, transitioning into another strategy would be important,” Tedros said.</p> <p>On WeChat, an article by the official account of the United Nations featuring Tedros’ comments in text has remained. But a video clip of the remarks embedded in the article has been removed over what the messaging app said was a “violation of regulations.” The messaging app has also banned users from sharing the article. A similar UN post on Twitter-like Weibo was reportedly also removed.</p> <p>Tedros joins a growing list of business leaders and public health experts to question the sustainability of China’s zero tolerance approach. At a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his closest</p>

advisors last week, the Chinese leaders doubled down on its zero-COVID policy and vowed to “resolutely fight against any speech that distorts, questions or rejects” the country’s pandemic measures.

Concerns about their economic costs, including what investors called an unprecedented capital flight, have also been censored from Chinese social media. Recurring lockdowns have slowed manufacturing activities and driven out foreign businesses and investors. A number of prominent [economists](#) have sounded the alarm, painting a [bleak outlook](#) for the world’s second-largest economy.

China is one of few countries in the world that continue to follow a strict eradication approach. With stringent lockdowns and hard-line quarantine measures, Chinese authorities try to stamp out any outbreak as soon as it is detected. In Shanghai, a lockdown that was supposed to last four days has entered its sixth week, fueling anguish in the community.

The approach has allowed China to keep its COVID death toll at around 15,000, remarkably low compared to other countries. According to [a recent modeling study](#) published in the scientific journal *Nature*, the more transmissible variant of Omicron could bring a “tsunami” of infections and up to 1.6 million deaths if the country lifted the harsh restrictions.

Speaking after Tedros at the Tuesday briefing, WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan said pandemic control measures should give “due respect to individuals and human rights.”

“We have always said as WHO that we need to balance the control measures against the impact they have on society, the impact they have on the economy, and that’s not always an easy calibration,” he added.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Study: California’s 2020 wildfire season
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220510-californias-2020-wildfire-season
GIST	<p>Just over 9,900 wildfires burned about 4.3 million acres in 2020. That’s more than twice the previous record of acres burned in California. Yet it is about average compared to burn rates likely experienced before Euro-American settlement, according to a study from the University of California, Davis, that summarizes the 2020 fire season and examines its drivers.</p> <p>The study, published in the journal <i>Global Ecology and Biogeography</i>, said 2020 was the first year in recorded history that burned area in California came close to rates seen before the 1800s, when an estimated 3-4 million acres burned in an average year.</p> <p>Increased fire severity is the far greater concern, the study said. The authors advise that resource and fire managers working in forests shift their emphasis from reducing burned area to reducing fire severity and fire damage to people and property, and restoring key ecosystem functions after fire.</p> <p>“Although burned area in 2020 was very high, it is not unprecedented if you take the longer view,” said lead author Hugh Safford, a forest and fire ecologist with the UC Davis Department of Environmental Science and Policy and chief scientist at Vibrant Planet, an environmental public benefits corporation.</p> <p>“The problem is that much of the burning we are seeing now is not restorative but destructive. The need to shift management goals is key, as is understanding the very important role that fuels play in driving fire severity.”</p> <p>A New Measure of Success</p> <p>California is the most fire-prone state in the United States. For the past century the key measure of success among forest managers has been decreased burned area, but that needs to change, according to the study.</p>

Reducing burned area remains an important goal in ecosystems like chaparral and sagebrush in coastal, lowland and eastern California. In these places, frequent fires lead to ecosystem degradation and threaten human safety.

But over the past 40 years, the increases in burned area in California occurred almost entirely in central and northern California forests and woodlands rather than in southern California chaparral, which used to be the poster child for the California “fire problem.” This is even though climate warming has been more extreme in southern California.

These forests experienced a naturally high frequency of fire before fire exclusion policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries restricted burns, including from lightning ignitions and Native American cultural burning. Fire exclusion led to a huge increase in forest density and fuels, driving an explosion in large, destructive fires.

“In these ecosystems, reducing burned area is a *cause* of the current catastrophic trends, not a solution to them,” the authors said.

Key 2020 Wildfire Statistics

The authors summarized 2020’s burning conditions, burned area and fire sizes, fire weather, fuel moisture, fatalities, property damage, suppression cost data, vegetation types, fire history and other variables from public data sources.

They found that fires in 2020 followed an accelerating, decades-long trend of increased burn area, severity, size and costs to society and the economy.

The fires killed 33 people in 2020 with overall economic losses of more than \$19 billion and firefighting costs approaching \$2.1 billion. The years 2020 and 2021 together burned more area than the previous seven years combined, and only slightly less than the total burned between 1980 and 1999.

Between 2015 and 2020, total insured economic losses were more than \$50 billion, and over 50,000 structures — mostly homes — were destroyed.

Air Quality and Wildfires

More than half of Californians experienced unhealthy, and sometimes hazardous, air quality index levels for a month or more in 2020, the study reports. The state’s worst five days of air pollution in history all occurred in 2020, according to CalFire.

Wildfire-driven air quality in August and September likely also caused 1,200 to 3,000 “excess” deaths among people age 65 or older.

The fires emitted nearly 112 million metric tons of carbon and 1.2 million tons of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). That’s 120 times more fine particulate matter than California’s vehicles produced in the same year.

‘We Can Do Something About This’

The study also assessed what drove fire severity patterns in 2020. Fire severity is a measure of the impact of burning on an ecosystem, measured in this study by losses in vegetation biomass.

Overall, fire severity was best explained by fuel load-related variables, with dryness and wind also playing key roles. Longer-term drought — including its effects on tree mortality before 2020 — was less important overall except in a handful of fires.

Nearly 60% of the fires were caused by humans through arson, vehicles, power lines, campfires or unknown causes, while lightning sparked the rest. However, the lightning-sparked fires burned more than five times the area burned by human-caused fires.

	<p>“Extreme weather conditions are certainly playing a role, but climate change isn’t driving all the change we’re seeing,” said Safford. “Fuel loads played a major role in driving fire severity patterns in forested landscapes in 2020, like in other years. High fuel loads are due mostly to human management decisions over the last century or more, and we can do something about this issue.”</p> <p>The authors said a recent agreement between the state and U.S. Forest Service that seeks to increase fuel-reduction activities is promising, as is the recent California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan. But, they add, “there is no time to lose.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 China doubles-down zero-Covid policy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/10/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases?name=styl-coronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline_live_updates_block_recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#china-shanghai-beijing-covid
GIST	<p>The Chinese authorities are tightening coronavirus restrictions in Shanghai and Beijing, heeding a message from the country’s top leader to double down on the zero-Covid strategy.</p> <p>In Shanghai, where residents have been under lockdown since April 1, private food delivery services were being suspended in some neighborhoods despite cases falling to a six-week low. Some residents were told not to step outside their homes, and that the government would help deliver groceries.</p> <p>In Beijing, where the daily case count rose to 74 on Monday, officials announced that schools would be closed indefinitely, and many of the city’s office workers have been told to work from home. Other cities around China continue to pursue various forms of partial or full lockdown.</p> <p>The tightening comes even as China’s daily count was at its lowest since mid-March, with a nationwide total of 3,426 new cases reported on Monday. Local officials have been on high alert, however, since the country’s top leader, Xi Jinping, urged the country to persist with a strategy of eradicating the virus and to allow no criticism of the approach. Now alone in its zero-Covid strategy, China has used its success in keeping infections and deaths low to claim that its mode of centralized governance gives priority to saving lives compared with democracies that have had more Covid deaths.</p> <p>When asked about China’s policies at a news briefing on Tuesday, the leader of the World Health Organization criticized the country’s approach.</p> <p>“We don’t think that it’s sustainable considering the behavior of the virus now, and what we anticipate in the future,” Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said. “We know a lot about that virus and we have better tools. So these are the additional opportunities that we have to make a shift.”</p> <p>City life remained at a standstill on Tuesday in Shanghai, where the last two subway lines that had continued to run during the citywide lockdown ceased operations.</p> <p>City residents also reported being told that they could be sent to government isolation facilities if anyone in their building was infected with the coronavirus. Before, only those living on the same floor as someone who tested positive had been required to go to a government facility.</p> <p>The rigid policy is drawing more complaints and small pockets of protest that have bubbled up online, and there have been accounts of residents being roughed up by pandemic workers.</p> <p>In his message last week, Mr. Xi urged officials not to tolerate criticism.</p> <p>Videos of neighborhood protests and conflicts between residents and health workers in Shanghai have been posted on Chinese social media and quickly scrubbed. Dissenting voices are also swiftly silenced. An economist who warned of economic consequences had his public social media accounts frozen. An article</p>

	<p>by a law professor saying that forcing people who tested positive to go to hospitals was a violation of law was scrubbed; his social media account was also suspended.</p> <p>Residents have expressed fears about being sent to a government facility, where conditions can be dire. Videos of police and health workers dragging people from their apartments have circulated widely online before being censored.</p> <p>In one widely shared video verified by The New York Times, a man in a hazmat suit approaches the window of a resident, pointing his finger at her and demanding that she go talk to police officers at her door.</p> <p>The woman is then seen trying to talk to the men through her front door, but several of them break down the door and force their way in. The woman repeatedly asks the officers to prove that she has tested positive before they take her to an isolation facility. They tell her that she has violated Covid prevention policies and that they have an order from the disease prevention agency to transfer her to an isolation facility. As the exchange becomes heated, she takes out her phone to call the police.</p> <p>One of the men replies, “If you called police, I’d still be the one coming.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 US: China military ‘acute’ threat to Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/may/10/chinese-poses-acute-threat-taiwan-us-intel-chief-s/
GIST	<p>China is building up the military forces needed to invade and take over Taiwan by 2030, posing what a top U.S. intelligence official described Tuesday as an “acute” threat to the island democracy.</p> <p>Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told a Senate hearing that China’s leaders are absorbing the lessons of Russia’s stalled invasion of Ukraine but remain determined to seize Taiwan, preferably through a capitulation of the Taiwanese government. Beijing has long contended that the island of nearly 24 million people is an integral part of China and has shown rising anger at U.S. efforts to boost Taiwan’s defensive resources.</p> <p>“It’s our view that they are working hard to effectively put themselves in a position in which their military is capable of taking Taiwan, over our intervention,” Ms. Haines told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing looking into rising global threats to U.S. security.</p> <p>“I think it’s fair to say that [the situation] is critical or acute between now and 2030,” she said when questioned by lawmakers.</p> <p>Intelligence agencies are evaluating what lessons China might be learning from the Russia-Ukraine war and how that would affect Beijing’s timeline. Russia’s difficulties in making headway against a much smaller rival since its invasion on Feb. 24 and the advantages defenders appear to have in modern warfare are factoring into China’s calculations.</p> <p>Adm. Philip Davidson, a former commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, said last year that China could attempt to take over Taiwan by the end of the decade. His successor, Adm. John Aquilino, said China could invade before 2030.</p> <p>U.S. and Taiwanese military capabilities will affect China’s decision on when to make a move. Those capabilities are being bolstered in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Ms. Haines said a Chinese military attack on Taiwan is expected to be more difficult for intelligence agencies to predict than the Russian invasion of Ukraine. U.S. analysts and the Biden White House repeatedly issued warnings before the war started.</p>

Army Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said there is a remote possibility that China will see the Ukraine conflict not as a cautionary tale but as an opportunity to launch an invasion of Taiwan.

The DIA assessment, however, is that the Chinese “aren’t ready to do that right now,” he said. He added that he could discuss the matter with lawmakers in a confidential, private briefing after the hearing.

Gen. Berrier said that based on monitoring Chinese military activities, “I’m not seeing anything that would tell me that they are thinking about trying to take advantage of this time that they think they might have” for a surprise invasion of Taiwan while much of the world is focused on Ukraine.

Taiwan needs to do more to increase its military capabilities, he said, and the government in Taipei is discussing steps with the Pentagon.

The lessons of Ukraine

Ms. Haines said the ruling Chinese Communist Party and military leaders are evaluating lessons of the military action in Ukraine and how they could impact a Taiwan scenario.

“So it’s a little harder to tell whether or not it’s an increased threat of their accelerating their efforts toward Taiwan or less so,” she said.

U.S. intelligence analysts do not assess that the Ukraine conflict is leading Beijing to step up plans for an invasion, she said.

Ms. Haines described two takeaways for the Chinese from the conflict in Ukraine.

One is surprise at the quick and unified economic sanctions from the United States and Europe in response to Russian aggression, even though Moscow is a major supplier of energy to much of Western Europe. Sanctions are something Beijing must now consider should it invade Taiwan.

The second lesson is whether the People’s Liberation Army has the confidence to succeed in a military invasion of Taiwan considering a likely U.S. military intervention.

That is expected to affect Chinese leaders’ decision-making regarding a Taiwan conflict.

“We think seeing what happened in Russia may give them less confidence in some respects over what it is that is likely to happen” in a war with Taiwan, Ms. Haines said.

Sen. Josh Hawley, Missouri Republican, said one of the lessons from Ukraine is that “deterrence didn’t work: Russia invaded Ukraine.”

“I, for one, don’t want to be having this conversation in any capacity in any period of years,” Mr. Hawley said. “My sense of urgency is [that] we’d better figure out how deterrence is going to work in Taiwan because if China is successful in a fait accompli, that’s going to look a lot different than a scenario in Ukraine.”

Gen. Berrier agreed. In his prepared testimony to the Senate panel, he said China is threatening Taiwan and continues to conduct provocative military activities, such as warplane incursions into Taipei’s air defense zones. The three-star general said China also is rapidly building up its military forces in all areas, including space and cyber weapons, which could tip the balance of deterrence across the 110-mile-wide Taiwan Strait.

“China has a range of military options to coerce Taiwan, including increasing military presence operations, an air and maritime blockade, seizure of Taiwan’s smaller outlying islands and a full-scale amphibious invasion of Taiwan itself,” he said. “Beijing appears willing to defer the use of military force

	<p>as long as it considers that unification with Taiwan can be negotiated” and a costly conflict can be avoided.</p> <p>China has not announced a timetable for reclaiming Taiwan but has increased hostile rhetoric and military activity over the past three years against Taipei and independence-leaning President Tsai Ing-wen.</p> <p>Chinese President Xi Jinping repeated his country’s long-standing refusal to renounce the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue in January 2019.</p> <p>This week, Chinese naval forces conducted exercises that Chinese state media said encircled the island. The exercises of a naval battle group included the aircraft carrier Liaoning with flights of J-15 fighters. Coinciding with the naval drills, Chinese warplanes conducted operations from Thursday to Sunday that involved nuclear-capable H-6 bombers and J-11 and J-16 fighters.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Day 77 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-77-of-russias-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukrainian forces have retaken villages in the Kharkiv region, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has said in his nightly address. The liberation of Cherkaski Tyshky, Ruski Tyshki, Borshchova and Slobozhanske could signal a new phase in the war, Zelenskiy said, while cautioning against expecting “certain victories”. • Belarus has said it will deploy special operations troops in three areas near its southern border with Ukraine. The Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko, said Moscow had agreed to help Minsk produce missiles and warned Belarus could “inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy”. • The number of civilians killed in Ukraine since the beginning of the war is “thousands higher” than official figures, the head of the UN’s human rights monitoring mission in the country said. The official UN civilian death toll in Ukraine stands at 3,381 as well as 3,680 injured. • At least 100 civilians remained in the Azovstal steelworks under heavy Russian fire in the southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol, an aide to the city’s mayor said. Ukraine’s Azov Regiment made a plea to the international community for help, saying its soldiers were trapped in “completely unsanitary conditions, with open wounds” and without necessary medication or food. • The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, will visit Finland and Sweden on Wednesday as they consider whether to apply for Nato membership. Downing Street said they would discuss “broader security issues”. • Ukrainian officials said they found the bodies of 44 civilians in the rubble of a five-storey building that was destroyed in March in Izium, about 120km (75 miles) from Kharkiv. • US lawmakers in the House of Representatives have approved more than \$40bn more aid for Ukraine. The legislation was due to go the US Senate with hopes high for its passage. • Vladimir Putin will “turn to more drastic means” to achieve his objectives in Ukraine, potentially triggering his resort to using a nuclear weapon, the US director of national intelligence has said. Avril Haines told the Senate armed services committee that the Russian president was “preparing for prolonged conflict” in Ukraine and that his strategic goals have “probably not changed”. • The UN general assembly has voted overwhelmingly for the Czech Republic to replace Russia on the top human rights body. • Ukraine has said it will suspend the flow of gas through a transit point that it says delivers almost a third of the fuel piped from Russia to Europe through Ukraine. GTSOU, which operates Ukraine’s gas system, said it would stop shipments via Sokhranivka from Wednesday, declaring “force majeure”, a clause invoked when a business is hit by something beyond its control, Reuters reported. Russia’s Gazprom said this would be “technologically impossible”.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four Russian regional governors reportedly resigned on Tuesday as the country braces for the impact of economic sanctions. The heads of the Tomsk, Saratov, Kirov and Mari El regions announced their immediate departure from office, while the head of Ryazan region said he would not run for another term. • Ukraine has been voted through to the grand final in the Eurovision song contest. At the end of their semi-final performance, the folk-rap group Kalush Orchestra thanked viewers for supporting Ukraine amid the Russian invasion. • The number of Ukrainians who have fled their country since Russia's invasion on 24 February is approaching six million, according to the United Nations.
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HEADLINE	05/10 US: Putin could resort to nuclear weapons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/10/putin-nuclear-weapons-us-intelligence-avril-haines
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin could view the prospect of defeat in Ukraine as an existential threat to his regime, potentially triggering his resort to using a nuclear weapon, the top US intelligence official has warned.</p> <p>The warning on Tuesday came in an assessment from intelligence chiefs briefing the Senate on worldwide threats. The prediction for Ukraine was a long, gruelling war of attrition, which could lead to increasingly volatile acts of escalation from Putin, including full mobilisation, the imposition of martial law, and – if the Russian leader felt the war was going against him, endangering his position in Moscow – even the use of a nuclear warhead.</p> <p>The grim forecast came on a day of continued fighting in the east and south of Ukraine, and Russian missile attacks on the port of Odesa, with the UN conceding that the civilian death toll from the war will probably be far higher than the current official estimate of 3,381.</p> <p>The director of national intelligence, Avril Haines, told the Senate armed services committee that Putin would continue to brandish Russia's nuclear arsenal in an attempt to deter the US and its allies from further support for Ukraine. The shift of focus to the east and the south are most likely a temporary tactic rather than a permanent scaling back of war aims, she said.</p> <p>The Russian leader would not use a nuclear weapon until he saw an existential threat to Russia or his regime, Haines argued. But she added that he could view the prospect of defeat in Ukraine as constituting such a threat.</p> <p>“We do think that [Putin's perception of an existential threat] could be the case in the event that he perceives that he is losing the war in Ukraine, and that Nato in effect is either intervening or about to intervene in that context, which would obviously contribute to a perception that he is about to lose the war in Ukraine,” Haines told the committee hearing.</p> <p>She added that the world would probably have some warning that nuclear use was imminent.</p> <p>“There are a lot of things that he would do in the context of escalation before he would get to nuclear weapons, and also that he would be likely to engage in some signaling beyond what he's done thus far before doing so,” Haines said.</p> <p>That signaling could include a further large-scale nuclear exercise involving the substantial dispersal of mobile intercontinental missiles, heavy bombers and strategic submarines.</p> <p>The assessment the US intelligence chiefs laid out for the senators suggested that Ukraine was faced with the prospect of a war of attrition. They said Putin intended to conquer the Luhansk and Donetsk regions plus a buffer zone around them, to secure a land bridge to Crimea. He wanted to hold Kherson, north of Crimea, to secure the water supply to the peninsula.</p>

However, his ambitions did not stop there. Haines said there were “indications” that Putin wants to extend the land bridge as far as Transnistria, the Moscow-occupied region of Moldova, thereby controlling all of Ukraine’s Black Sea coast. Haines said, however, that Putin would face an uphill task, and that the extension of the land bridge to Transnistria, including the capture of Odesa, would not be possible without a full mobilisation. She added that the capture of the Donbas plus a buffer zone was unlikely in the next few weeks.

The head of the Defence Intelligence Agency, Lt Gen Scott Berrier, said that the US believed that between eight and 10 Russian generals had been killed so far in the conflict.

Like Haines, Berrier predicted a stalemate, with neither side able to achieve a breakthrough. But a decision by Putin to order a full mobilisation in Russia, ushered in by a formal declaration of war, could change the military balance.

“If they do mobilise, and they do declare war, that’ll bring thousands more soldiers to the fight,” Berrier said. “And even though they may not be as well trained and competent, they will still bring mass and a lot more ammunition.”

Despite all the setbacks, Haines said Putin was probably convinced that Russia ultimately had more stamina than Ukraine and its backers.

“He is probably counting on the US and EU resolve to weaken as food shortages, inflation and energy prices get worse,” she said.

Given Putin’s conviction he could ultimately prevail, and the fact that Ukraine showed no signs of giving in, Haines said US intelligence agencies “do not see a viable negotiating path forward, at least in the short term”.

Meanwhile, as the war of attrition continued, the conflict was likely to take “a more unpredictable and potentially escalatory trajectory”.

“The current trend increases the likelihood that President Putin will turn to more drastic means, including imposing martial law, reorienting industrial production, or potentially escalatory military actions to free up the resources needed to achieve his objectives as the conflict drags on, or if he perceives Russia is losing in Ukraine,” Haines said.

The most likely flashpoint in the coming weeks, she added, would be escalating Russian attempts to intimidate the west to stop weapons supplies into Ukraine and possible retaliation for western economic sanctions or perceived threats to Putin’s regime at home.

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HEADLINE	05/10 China: infections jump if no zero-Covid
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/11/lifting-zero-covid-policies-in-china-could-risk-16m-deaths-says-study
GIST	<p>The lifting of zero-Covid policies in China would see a “tsunami” of infections and almost 1.6 million deaths, a study claims, citing in part China’s low vaccination rate of elderly residents.</p> <p>China’s government remains committed to a zero-Covid policy, employing resource intensive mass testing and case surveillance, and enforcing lockdowns, strict quarantine and isolation. A speech last week by the president, Xi Jinping, reaffirmed the commitment, despite the challenge posed by the Omicron variant which has already overwhelmed other countries’ zero-Covid policies.</p> <p>The peer reviewed study by Shanghai’s Fudan University, published in the Nature journal, said a decision by Chinese authorities to lift such measures could see more than 112 million symptomatic cases of Covid-19, five million hospitalisations, and 1.55 million deaths.</p>

“We find that the level of immunity induced by the March 2022 vaccination campaign would be insufficient to prevent an Omicron wave that would result in exceeding critical care capacity with a projected intensive care unit peak demand of 15.6 times the existing capacity,” the paper said.

However it also said that with access to vaccines and antivirals and “maintaining implementation of non-pharmaceutical interventions”, authorities could prevent the health system being overwhelmed. It suggested these factors could be more of a focus in future policies.

While the government message is that the zero-Covid policy will prevail over the highly transmissible variant, health officials have said they cannot open up now because vaccine coverage is insufficient and health resources too uneven across the country.

Health experts agree, but China analysts are also concerned the authorities have backed themselves into a corner with no political exit ramp for the policy without admitting failure.

Case numbers are dropping in China but remain spread across multiple provinces. On Wednesday authorities reported 1,905 cases including 302 symptomatic. The bulk of cases are still being found in Shanghai, which has been under lockdown for more than two months.

On Tuesday authorities announced new guidelines for people to home quarantine. Part of the change specified that among other requirements, the homes must have ventilation and drainage systems that “won’t contaminate those of other households”, a report in the Global Times said. Other requirements include separate bathrooms and bedrooms, and the ability to care for oneself – in line with home isolation arrangements in other countries.

However the prospect of allowing some asymptomatic people and close contacts to stay home has ignited debate among epidemiologists and health officials, and comes in stark contrast to the enforcement of measures on the ground, especially in Shanghai. Since Xi’s speech last week, enforcement in the city appears to have hardened further. Social media is awash with videos of health workers and police officers in full protective equipment zealously enforcing regulations.

There appears to be growing frustration with how the rules and regulations are being enforced, with many questioning how it compares to recent moves by authorities to take people into quarantine facilities if they live on the same or an adjoining floor as a confirmed case. Shanghai authorities on Tuesday said officials were making judgments and risk assessments on a case by case basis.

“The policy is policy, the implementation is implementation, the two are separate,” said one commenter.

Another said his girlfriend’s parents were taken away and the whole residence isolated despite them not sharing communal areas with a nearby case.

“My girlfriend’s parents – two veteran party members who have been party members for more than 40 years – can’t help but cry, and they can’t figure out whether there is a unified policy.”

On Tuesday the WHO’s director general, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said his organisation did not think China’s zero-Covid policy was “sustainable considering the behaviour of the virus”.

“We have discussed about this issue with Chinese experts and we indicated that the approach will not be sustainable ... I think a shift would be very important,” he said.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Study: ICE built vast surveillance dragnet
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/10/us-immigration-agency-ice-domestic-surveillance-study

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) has built a vast digital surveillance system that gives it access to the personal details of almost every person in America, a two-year investigation by Georgetown University law center has found.

Researchers from the Center on Privacy & Technology on Tuesday released one of the most [comprehensive reviews of Ice activities](#), concluding that the federal organisation has strayed well beyond its duties as an immigration body to become what is in effect a domestic surveillance agency.

Operating largely in secret and with minimal public oversight, Ice has amassed a formidable armory of digital capabilities that allows its agents to “pull detailed dossiers on nearly anyone, seemingly at any time”.

The vast mountain of data to which Ice now has access includes:

- Driver’s license data for three of every four adults living in the US.
- Data drawn from the utility records of 75% of adults, covering more than 218 million unique utility consumers in all 50 states.
- Information on the movements of drivers in cities that contain 75% of the US population.
- Facial recognition technology drawn from the driver’s license photos of at least a third of all adults.

The Georgetown researchers base their report, [American Dragnet: Data-Driven Deportation in the 21st Century](#), on hundreds of freedom of information requests and a review of more than 100,000 previously unseen Ice spending transactions.

The documents reveal the extent to which the agency’s surveillance has expanded beyond sharing information with law enforcement agencies to exploiting an array of public and private databases.

The agency operates an enormous dragnet of information stored by state and local government, utility companies, social media platforms and private data brokers. The end result is that Ice enjoys almost universal reach, with its intelligence weaponised through the use of powerful algorithmic tools for searching and analysing data.

Almost all of that activity, the report points out, is done in the absence of warrants and in secret, beyond the purview of federal and state authorities.

The scale of Ice surveillance shocked even the report’s authors.

“I was alarmed to discover just how easily federal immigration agents can pull detailed records from the most intimate corners of all our lives,” Nina Wang, a policy associate at the Center on Privacy & Technology and a report author, told the Guardian.

She added: “In its attempts to target an ever-growing number of people for detention and deportation, Ice has reached into the private homes and lives of almost every person in America.”

Wang said the immigration agency now had an unfettered ability to “trace the movement of your vehicle on the roads, look up your address from your water or electricity bills, and conduct face recognition searches on your ID photos, all without needing a search warrant.

“These tactics open massive side doors around existing privacy protections, and many lawmakers still have no idea.”

Ice was created in 2003, in the febrile post-9/11 era. Initially it focused on mining the intelligence-gathering potential of the criminal justice system, operating a scheme known as S-Comm in which digital fingerprint data was shared with it by federal, state and local law enforcement.

Since then, Ice has increasingly resorted to databases compiled by non-law enforcement entities as a way of widening its dragnet. The Georgetown researchers suggest the motivation was partly to increase the number of deportations of undocumented people and partly as part of the US government's "larger push to amass as much information as possible about all of our lives".

The center's review of Ice spending from 2008 to last year revealed that overall investment in new surveillance infrastructure increased fivefold from about \$71m to \$388m. In that period, Ice spent more than \$1.3bn on geolocation technology, including contracts with private companies that own license plate scanning databases.

A further \$96m was spent on biometrics, largely face recognition databases; \$97m on private data brokers that gather data on individuals from a range of different sources including more than 80 utility companies; and a staggering \$569m on data analysis just to be able to comb through the mammoth quantities of intelligence Ice now had within its grasp.

Approximately \$189m was paid to Palantir Technologies, the tech company co-founded and chaired by the Trump-supporting billionaire Peter Thiel. The money went towards custom-built programs created by Palantir to allow Ice agents to link public and private databases so that they could, in the center's words, "visualise an interconnected web of data pulled from nearly every part of an individual's life".

The researchers found a woefully inadequate response from federal and state authorities in terms of privacy protection. Congress, for instance, has yet to hold a full oversight hearing on Ice surveillance.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the Ice surveillance system is how it has been used to skirt controls introduced by cities and states and designed to protect communities from precisely these kind of intrusive searches.

After many legislatures introduced so-called "sanctuary" policies that prevented police forces working with Ice agents to facilitate deportations, Ice simply sidestepped the restrictions by finding other channels through which it could acquire intelligence, including through DMVs, private data brokers and utility companies.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Pro-choice group claims Wisconsin arson
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/10/abortion-arson-attack-wisconsin-pro-choice-janes-revenge
GIST	<p>Federal agents and detectives from the Madison police department are investigating a claim by a pro-choice group that it was behind a weekend arson attack on an anti-abortion office in Wisconsin.</p> <p>The headquarters of Wisconsin Family Action in Madison was attacked in the early hours of Sunday, with a molotov cocktail thrown through a window, starting a small fire, and graffiti spray-painted on an exterior wall. Nobody was hurt.</p> <p>In a statement reported on Tuesday by the Lincoln Journal Star, which said it was unable to verify the group's authenticity, Jane's Revenge said it launched the attack because of the organization's anti-abortion stance, and demanded that similar institutions across the US disband or face "increasingly extreme tactics".</p> <p>"Wisconsin is the first flashpoint, but we are all over the US, and we will issue no further warnings," the statement said, citing the violence of anti-choice groups who "bomb [abortion] clinics and assassinate doctors with impunity" as justification.</p> <p>The Madison attack came days after the leaking of a supreme court draft ruling that would overturn its 1973 Roe v Wade decision and end almost half a century of constitutional abortion protections.</p>

On Tuesday, a spokesperson for the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) told the Guardian that its agents were aware of the group's claims of responsibility, but cited the ongoing investigation for being unable to give more details.

The Madison police department said it was "aware of a group claiming responsibility for the arson at Wisconsin Family Action and are working with our federal partners to determine the veracity of that claim".

It urged anyone with relevant information to make contact, saying: "We take all information and tips related to this case seriously and are working to vet each and every one."

At a press conference on Monday afternoon, the Madison PD and ATF agents announced a joint investigation into what it called an "abortion extremism case involving an arson and graffiti attack of a pro-life advocacy office in Madison".

The Madison police chief, Shon Barnes, said no suspects had so far been identified. Authorities were expected to give a further update on Tuesday afternoon.

In a values statement on its website, Wisconsin Family Action (WFA) describes itself as a Judeo-Christian group dedicated to "strengthening, preserving, and promoting marriage, family, life and liberty.

"We support the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception through natural death. This includes opposing legislation that promotes the destruction of human life – which starts at conception – through abortion and other means," it says.

Jack Hoogendyk, the WFA board chairman, attacked the response to the attack in a tweet posted on Tuesday morning, singling out Wisconsin's Democratic governor, Tony Evers, and Madison PD detectives.

"We need to see a much stronger message of condemnation of this activity from our Governor [and] from local law enforcement," he wrote.

At a press conference on Monday, Evers called the attack "a horrible incident".

Calling for a full investigation and arrests, he added: "As the state of Wisconsin, we don't accept that type of violence here."

An attack on an anti-abortion office is a relative rarity compared with attacks on abortion clinics and providers. In 2019, the Guardian reported on an "alarming escalation" in picketing, vandalism and trespassing by anti-abortion activists at medical facilities.

Arson, bombings, murders and acid attacks were among more than 300 acts of extreme violence recorded by the Rand Corporation between 1973 and 2003, and in one of the most heinous incidents, in 2009, Dr George Tiller, a Kansas abortion provider, was shot dead in a church in Wichita.

In March, MS magazine reported that the number of brick-and-mortar abortion clinics nationwide had dropped precipitously, partly because of the constant threat of violence against personnel. Six states, MS said, had only one abortion provider, mostly small, independent operators who were considered most at risk.

"Abortion clinics have been closing at an alarming rate," the article said. "Independent providers are the most vulnerable to anti-abortion attacks and violence directed at their staff."

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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/high-gas-prices-2022-russia/507-ce46e5ca-8c97-44c4-92a0-d5650194a167
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Just as Americans gear up for summer road trips, the price of oil remains stubbornly high, pushing prices at the gas pump to painful heights.</p> <p>Drivers were paying \$4.37 for a gallon of regular Tuesday, on average, according to AAA. That's 25 cents higher than a month ago, and \$1.40 more than a year ago.</p> <p>“The price of gas is ridiculous,” said Joel Baxter, a nurse, who was filling up his car at a BP station in Brooklyn, New York, so that he could commute 26 miles to work. “The money, your salary, is practically the same, and everything is going up, so they should do something about it.”</p> <p>The high price of oil is the main cause of the biting gasoline prices. A barrel of U.S. benchmark crude was selling for around \$100 a barrel Tuesday, a price tag that has been climbing throughout the year. The high price of oil is largely because many buyers are refusing to purchase Russian oil because of its invasion of Ukraine. The European Union is considering an embargo on oil from Russia, which is a major supplier. Those pressures leave less oil to go around.</p> <p>Drivers such as Baxter say they wish the government could step in to help, although few can say what solution that would bring lasting relief.</p> <p>"There are very few things that a president can do to help lower the cost of oil, and this administration tried to do pretty much everything that it can," said Andrew Gross, spokesman for AAA.</p> <p>President Joe Biden released oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in November and March, hoping to reduce prices. That helped temporarily, but prices shot back up and stayed stubbornly high.</p> <p>Biden in remarks Tuesday stressed that fighting inflation is his top priority, a sign of both the economic challenges caused by prices rising at the fastest pace in four decades and the political drag for Democrats that has resulted.</p> <p>“I believe that inflation is our top economic challenge right now,” Biden said.</p> <p>He said that switching away from fossil fuels and greater energy efficiency will ultimately protect Americans from higher gasoline and heating and cooling costs.</p> <p>The president noted that Americans are finding ways to limit how many fill-ups they need because of higher prices. “They’re doing everything in their power to figure out how to not show up at the gas pump,” he said.</p> <p>White House press secretary Jen Psaki said a suspension of the federal gas tax is “an option on the table.” The suspension could in theory reduce gas prices by as much as 18 cents a gallon.</p> <p>Republican lawmakers say the key is to lease more federal land for oil and gas drilling and send a positive message to energy producers by greenlighting the Keystone XL pipeline that Biden nixed last year.</p> <p>As the war Russia is waging on Ukraine continues and demand for gasoline continues to grow, experts are not expecting relief at the pump any time soon.</p> <p>“We will see this trend continue probably throughout summer, mainly because of demand,” Gross said. “The weather’s getting warmer. The days are getting nicer. People are hitting the road.”</p> <p>That's particularly hard on people who drive for a living, or those who must drive to get to work.</p> <p>“It’s expensive,” said Peter Lector, 28, who spent \$60 Tuesday to fill up his tank in Brooklyn. “I’m doing Uber, so it’s costing me a lot of money every morning.”</p>

	<p>If the price of gasoline keeps going up, he feels like he might have to find another job, he said.</p> <p>Still others have accepted that high gasoline prices may be here to stay.</p> <p>“It is what it is,” said David Stephen, who was also buying gasoline in Brooklyn. “Everything goes up, never comes down You can’t do anything about it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 KCSO update on firings from vax mandate
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/king-county-sheriffs-office-gives-update-deputy-firings-due-vaccine-mandate/BVPSVAK76VC3LGDLK6EXB5OOVY/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — With vacancies soaring at the King County Sheriff’s Office, acting King County Sheriff Patti Cole-Tindall gave an update on how the mandatory COVID-19 vaccination mandate has impacted staffing and operations at the sheriff’s office during a King County Council committee meeting Tuesday.</p> <p>During the council’s Government Accountability and Oversight Committee meeting, Cole-Tindall said her number one priority is finding a solution to recruit more deputies.</p> <p>“It is a whole number of issues that’s come together at the same time and one thing that worries me, keeps me up at night is if our numbers continue to increase in the case of our commissioned vacancies, we are at risk of not being able to provide basic public service,” said Cole-Tindall.”</p> <p>Recently, King County council member Reagan Dunn pushed to end the firing of unvaccinated deputies due to the staffing shortages amid an uptick in violence in King County.</p> <p>“I’ve disagreed with the policy, and the vaccine mandate at the sheriff’s office from the beginning because of the substantial loss of personnel,” said Dunn. “Whether they were forced into retirement ... or the fear of disclosing information, or not granted an exemption and I see there’s (around) 112 deputy vacancies. It’s substantial.”</p> <p>As of May 5, the King County Sheriff’s Office has 113 commissioned vacancies and 59 vacancies for professional staff members.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department is also looking to hire 125 officers this year.</p> <p>357 officers have left the department over the last two years, according to Chief Adrian Diaz.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Record high gas prices Washington, Idaho
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/traffic/gas-prices/gas-prices-new-record-high-washington-idaho/293-52d15663-86d1-4f9e-95f8-d6f98feafef1
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — It’s not the news that drivers wanted to hear, but gas prices are on the rise again and setting new record highs.</p> <p>Nationally, the average price for regular fuel is now a record \$4.37 per gallon, according to AAA. Diesel prices are even higher, at a record of \$5.55 per gallon.</p> <p>In the Northwest, drivers are paying even more to gas up, according to AAA. In Washington state, the average price hit a record high of \$4.87 per gallon on Tuesday. Idaho gas prices are slightly cheaper, but still at a record high of \$4.48 per gallon.</p>

The record highs follow a big surge in gas prices over the past two weeks. AAA [reports](#) the increase is tied to the high cost of crude oil, which has jumped about \$10 per barrel in the last week.

“With the cost of oil accounting for more than half of the pump price, more expensive oil means more expensive gasoline,” Andrew Gross, AAA spokesperson said in a written statement.

GasBuddy, an online platform that tracks prices across the country, tied the recent fuel increases to talks about the European Union sanctioning Russian oil. They also warned that gas prices “could continue to climb through Memorial Day.”

“There’s little, if any, good news about fuel prices heading into summer, and the problem could become worse should we see an above average hurricane season, which could knock out refinery capacity at a time we badly need it as refined product inventories continue to plummet,” Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy said in a written statement.

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HEADLINE	05/09 Top 25 overvalued housing markets in US
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/us-housing-prices-top-25-most-overvalued-markets-2022-report
GIST	<p>Nearly every community in the U.S. is feeling the effects of an overvalued housing market, particularly in some smaller cities in states like Idaho and Tennessee where many sought out a new home during the pandemic.</p> <p>Data provided to FOX Television Stations by Moody’s Analytics shows homes in 97% of U.S. metro areas are overpriced, with the most overvalued markets seeing homes priced at 50% to 70% more than they’re worth. This overvaluation is compared to the historical norms of local household incomes, rents, and construction costs.</p> <p>And while economists aren’t predicting a crash, they don’t expect these overvaluations will last. Mark Zandi, the chief economist at Moody’s Analytics, noted how many of these markets were "juiced up" because of previously low mortgage rates and the implementation of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Zandi predicted that prices will start falling within the next few of years — but buyers will need to be patient.</p> <p>"I wouldn’t be surprised if some areas [begin to see] some outright price declines, relative to the record high prices we’re seeing right now," Zandi said.</p> <p>"But it’s not like the stock market which could change in an instant," he continued. "The housing market takes time to kind of work through all of this. It’s not going to be next month or the next six months, it’s probably the next year to three or four to see all of this unfold."</p> <p>Idaho: a housing hotspot</p> <p>In Boise, Idaho, the most overpriced market in the nation, homes are 73% overvalued, according to Moody’s analysis.</p> <p>Idaho has four cities ranked in the top 15 overvalued markets on Moody’s list. Homes in Coeur d’Alene are 56% overpriced, while home prices in Pocatello and Idaho Falls are 49% and 49% overpriced, respectively.</p> <p>Zandi said a number of factors have played key roles in causing house prices to skyrocket in Boise and other parts of the state.</p> <p>First, the Federal Reserve slashed interest rates during the pandemic in an effort to help the U.S. economy, which "juiced-up housing demand because it just looked really quite affordable," Zandi noted. But on top</p>

of that, there had already been a limited supply of housing — a vestige of the financial crisis over a decade ago.

"That wiped out the homebuilding industry and it's taken a long time to get the home building industry back up and running and building homes, so we have this enormous demand, combined with this shortage of homes. And this has caused prices to go northward," Zandi said.

Another factor in cities like Boise was the implementation of remote work during the pandemic. With more flexibility at work, many Americans left larger cities like San Francisco or Seattle for communities with comparatively cheaper housing prices.

In the first year of the pandemic, Idaho was among the top five states that saw the most inbound moves, according to [FOX Business](#).

"So both of those dynamics have played a key role in causing house prices to go skyward in Boise. Of course... interest rates are up and remote work is starting to unwind, so those supports to house prices are starting to fade away," Zandi noted.

In Tennessee, where four cities made the top 20 list of overpriced markets, homebuyers in Morristown, a city with a population of just under 30,000, are paying 57% over value for homes.

The pandemic also sparked a boom in second-home buying. Many affluent Americans, amid remote work and record-low mortgage rates, began buying more vacation homes — reaching a peak of 88% above pre-pandemic levels in March 2021, according [to a recent report from Redfin](#), a real estate brokerage.

Many of the overvalued areas today — particularly in smaller markets on Moody's list — are also a result of the demand for second-home buying, Zandi said.

"Also during the pandemic, the number of retirees increased quite dramatically. So retirees looking for a place to go, these are pretty attractive places as retiree destinations and that also added to the demand," he explained.

Will these overvalued housing markets cool off?

"If you're a homeowner, and you're watching the value of your house go up... it feels pretty good," Zandi said. "But if you're a first-time homebuyer, this is a real problem, because you know — you have to pay a lot more for it."

Zandi noted how the [median home price in the U.S.](#) has hovered around \$400,000. For someone putting 20% down at the current mortgage rate, "you're paying \$500 more a month now than you would have a year ago for the median-priced home with 20% down at that mortgage rate."

For many Americans looking to buy a home, that thought can be frustrating.

Zandi predicted that prices nationwide are likely to go flat, at least for the next two to three years as incomes and rents catch up and valuations normalize over time.

"Some markets probably will see some price declines, particularly the most active markets like Boise, the poster child, or the top of the list of overvalued markets," Zandi said.

While some people may need to buy a home sooner than later, Zandi recommended that buyers wait a bit if possible and potentially find a better window — noting how mortgage rates "go up, go down, they go all around."

"If you're not in a big rush for whatever reason, it probably behooves you to be patient here," he said.

Top 25 most overvalued markets in the U.S., according to Moody's:

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Boise, Idaho: 73% 2. Sherman-Denison, Texas: 60% 3. Muskegon, Mich.: 59% 4. Homosassa Springs, Fla.: 57% 5. Morristown, Tenn.: 57% 6. Lake Havasu City-Kingman, Ariz.: 56% 7. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho: 56% 8. Kahului-Wailuku-Lahaina, Hawaii: 55% 9. Dalton, Ga.: 55% 10. Flagstaff, Ariz.: 51% 11. Pocatello, Idaho: 49% 12. Albany, Ore.: 48% 13. Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville, Fla.: 48% 14. Bremerton-Silverdale, Wash: 48% 15. Idaho Falls, Idaho: 48% 16. Nashville-Davidson—Murfreesboro—Franklin, Tenn.: 48% 17. Clarksville, Tenn.: 48% 18. Myrtle Beach-Conway-North Myrtle Beach, S.C.: 47% 19. Bellingham, Wash.: 47% 20. Cleveland, Tenn.: 46% 21. Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, Ariz.: 46% 22. Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, Nev.: 46% 23. Asheville, N.C.: 46% 24. Flint, Mich.: 46% 25. Spokane-Spokane Valley, Wash.: 45%
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HEADLINE	05/10 Fed confronts acting too slow on inflation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/business/economy/federal-reserve-inflation.html
GIST	<p>Some Federal Reserve officials have begun to acknowledge that they were too slow to respond to rapid inflation last year, a delay that is forcing them to constrain the economy more abruptly now — and one that could hold lessons for the policy path ahead.</p> <p>Inflation began to accelerate last spring, but Fed policymakers and most private-sector forecasters initially thought price gains would quickly fade. It became clear in early fall that fast inflation was proving to be more lasting — but the Fed pivoted toward rapidly removing policy support only in late November and did not raise rates until March.</p> <p>Several current and former Fed officials have suggested in recent days that, in hindsight, the central bank should have reacted more quickly and forcefully last fall, but that both profound uncertainty about the future and the Fed's approach to setting policy slowed it down.</p> <p>Officials had spent years dealing with tepid inflation, which made some hesitant to believe that rapidly rising prices would last. Even as they became more concerned, it took the Fed's large group of policymakers time to come to an agreement on how to respond. Another complicating factor was that the Fed had made clear promises to markets about how it would remove support for the economy, which made adjusting quickly more difficult.</p> <p>"It was a complicated situation with little precedent — people make mistakes," Randal K. Quarles, who was the Fed's vice chair for supervision in 2021, said at a conference last week.</p> <p>Mr. Quarles, who left the Fed at the end of the year, argued that it should have begun to pull back support aggressively after September. He added, however, that the rate increases that central bankers were now making could still fix the situation.</p>

Even so, the delay could come with consequences. By the time the Fed completely stopped buying bonds and began raising rates in March, prices were rising [8.5 percent](#) from a year earlier, the fastest rate since 1981. Consumer price increases are expected to remain rapid when fresh data are released Wednesday.

And as high prices have lingered, [inflation expectations](#) have been [creeping up](#), threatening to change household and business behavior in ways that perpetuate the problem.

Because inflation is eating away at paychecks and making it more difficult for families to afford groceries and cars, it has emerged as a major political issue for President Biden, whose approval ratings have fallen over concerns about his handling of the economy. During remarks at the White House on Tuesday, Mr. Biden called inflation his “top priority” and said his administration was taking steps to contain it. He also sought to push back on Republicans, who have spent months blaming him for stoking inflation, saying their policy ideas were “extreme” and would hurt working families.

“I want every American to know that I’m taking inflation very seriously,” Mr. Biden said, noting that the Fed has the “primary role” in trying to tame price increases.

The Fed is now raising rates quickly to wrestle the situation back under control. Officials lifted borrowing costs half a percentage point this month, their biggest increase since 2000, while broadcasting that two more large adjustments could be coming. They are also going to start shrinking their \$9 trillion balance sheet of bond holdings next month.

If the Fed continues to rapidly adjust policy this year as it tries to catch up, policymakers risk slamming the brakes on a speeding economy. Such hard stops can hurt, pushing up unemployment and possibly tipping off a recession. Officials typically prefer to apply their policy brakes gradually, increasing the chances that the economy can slow down painlessly.

Still, several Fed officials pointed out that it was easier to say what the Fed should have done in 2021 after the fact — that in the moment, it was difficult to know price increases would last. Inflation initially came mainly from a few big products that were in short supply amid supply chain snarls, like semiconductors and cars. Only later in the year did it become obvious that price pressures were broadening to food, rent and other areas.

“I try to give some grace, and say: In a very uncertain time, with an unprecedented setting, with no real models to guide us, people are going to do the best they can,” Raphael Bostic, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, said in an interview Monday. Mr. Bostic was an early voice suggesting that the Fed should stop buying bonds and think about raising interest rates.

Officials have said it was the acceleration in inflation data in September, followed by rising employment costs, that convinced them that price gains might last and that the central bank needed to act decisively. The Fed chair, Jerome H. Powell, pivoted on policy in late November as those data points added up.

While Mr. Quarles argued that the Fed should have responded as the September data came in, he suggested that there had been [a complicating factor](#): Mr. Powell was waiting to see if he would be reappointed by the Biden administration, which did not announce its decision to renominate him until mid-November.

Mr. Quarles, on a [“Banking With Interest” podcast episode](#) last week, said reacting to the data was “hard to do until there was clarity as to what the leadership going forward of the Fed was going to be.”

Plus, the Fed had promised to withdraw policy in a certain way, which prevented a rapid reorientation once officials began to fret that inflation might last. Policymakers had pledged to keep interest rates at rock bottom and continue to buy huge sums of bonds until the job market had healed substantially. They had also clearly laid out how they would remove support when the time came: Bond purchases would slow first, then stop, and only then would rates rise.

The point was to convince investors that the Fed would not stop helping the economy too early and to avoid roiling markets, but that so-called forward guidance meant that pulling back support was a drawn-out process.

“Forward guidance, like everything in economics, has benefits and costs,” Richard H. Clarida, who was vice chair of the Fed in 2021 and recently left the central bank, said at a conference last week. “If there’s guidance that the committee feels bound to honor,” he added, it can be complicated for the Fed to move through a sequence of policy moves.

Christopher Waller, a governor at the Fed, noted the central bank wasn’t just sitting still. Markets began to adjust as the Fed sped up its plans to remove policy support throughout the fall, which is making money more expensive to borrow and starting to slow down economic conditions. Mortgage rates, one window into how Fed policy is playing out into the economy, began to move up notably in January 2021 and are now at the highest level since the 2008 housing crisis.

Mr. Waller also pointed out that it was hard to get the Fed’s large policy-setting committee into agreement rapidly.

“Policy is set by a large committee of up to 12 voting members and a total of 19 participants in our discussions,” he said during a speech last week. “This process may lead to more gradual changes in policy as members have to compromise in order to reach a consensus.”

Loretta Mester, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said in an interview on Tuesday that different people on the committee “looked at the same data with different lenses, and that’s just the nature of the beast.”

But the Fed seems to be learning lessons from its 2021 experience.

Policymakers are avoiding giving clear guidance about what will come next for policy: Officials have said they want to quickly get rates up to the point that they start to weigh on the economy, then go from there. While Mr. Powell said the Fed was thinking about half-point increases at its next two meetings, he gave no clear guidance about what would follow.

“It’s a very difficult environment to try to give forward guidance, 60, 90 days in advance — there are just so many things that can happen in the economy and around the world,” Mr. Powell said at a news conference last week. “So we’re leaving ourselves room to look at the data and make a decision as we get there.”

The war in Ukraine is the latest surprise that is changing the outlook for the economy and inflation in ways that are hard to predict, Mr. Bostic from Atlanta said.

“I have been humbled, chastened — whatever — to think that I know the range of possible things that can happen in the future,” he said. “I’ve really tried to back off of leaning into one kind of story or path.”

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HEADLINE	05/10 For millions, good times are right now
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/business/economy-boom-times.html
GIST	<p>This is an era of great political division and dramatic cultural upheaval. Much more quietly, it has been a time of great financial reward for a large number of Americans.</p> <p>For the 158 million who are employed, prospects haven’t been this bright since men landed on the moon. As many as half of those workers have retirement accounts that were fattened by a prolonged bull market in stocks. There are 83 million owner-occupied homes in the United States. At the rate they have been increasing in value, a lot of them are in effect a giant piggy bank that families live inside.</p>

This boom does not get celebrated much. It was a slow-build phenomenon in a country where news is stale within hours. It has happened during a time of fascination with the schemes of the truly wealthy (see: [Musk, Elon](#)) and against a backdrop of increased inequality. If you were unable to buy a house because of spiraling prices, the soaring amount of homeowners' equity is not a comfort.

The [queasy stock market](#) might be signaling that the boom is ending. A slowing economy, renewed inflation, high gas prices and rising interest rates could all undermine the gains achieved over the years. But for the moment, this flood of wealth is quietly redefining retirement, helping fuel Silicon Valley and stoking a boom in leisure and entertainment. It is boosting corporate profits by unprecedented amounts while also giving just about everyone the notion that a better job might be within reach.

More than 4.5 million workers voluntarily quit in March, the highest number since the government started keeping this statistic in 2000, [the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported last week](#). A few years ago, the monthly total was between three million and 3.5 million.

"Maybe it's easier to focus on the negative, but a huge number of people, maybe 40 million households, have been doing pretty well," said Dean Baker, an economist who was a co-founder of the liberal-leaning Center for Economic and Policy Research. "You'd have to go back to the late 1990s to find a similar era. Before that, the 1960s."

This widespread wealth throws light on why the number of workers who say they expect to be working past their early 60s [has fallen below 50 percent for the first time](#). It accounts for the abundance of \$1 billion start-ups known as unicorns — more than 1,000 now, up from about 200 in 2015. It offers a reason for the rise in interest in unionizing companies from Amazon to Apple to Starbucks, as hourly workers seek to claim their share.

And it helps explain why Dwight and Denise Makinson just returned from a 12-day cruise through Germany.

"Our net worth has reached the millionaire level due to our investments, which was unfathomable when we were married 40 years ago," said Mr. Makinson, 76, who is retired from the U.S. Forest Service.

The couple, who live in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, have company. There are 22 million U.S. millionaires, Credit Suisse estimates, up from fewer than 15 million in 2014.

"I used coupons to buy things. One of my daughters would say, 'Mom, that's so embarrassing,'" said Ms. Makinson, 66, a registered nurse. "But we believed in saving. Now she uses coupons, too."

Every economic transaction has several sides. No one thought home prices in 2000 were particularly cheap. But in the last six years, prices have risen by the total value of all housing in 2000, [according to the Case-Schiller index](#). In many areas of the country, it has become practically impossible for renters to buy a house.

This is fracturing society. Even as [the overall homeownership rate](#) in 2020 rose to 65.5 percent, the rate for Black Americans has severely lagged. At 43.4 percent, it is lower than the 44.2 percent in 2010. The rate for Hispanics is only marginally better.

That disparity might account for the muted sense of achievement.

"It's a time of prosperity, a time of abundance, and yet it doesn't seem that way," said Andy Walden, vice president of enterprise research at Black Knight, which analyzes financial data.

Shawn and Stephanie McCauley said the value of their house 20 miles north of Seattle had shot up 50 percent since they bought it a few years ago, a jump that was typical of the market.

“We are very fortunate right now given the situation for many others during the pandemic,” said Mr. McCauley, 36, who works for a data orchestration company. “Somehow we are doing even better financially, and it feels a bit awkward.”

Even for those doing well, the economy feels precarious. The University of Michigan’s venerable Index of Consumer Sentiment fell in March to the same levels as 1979, when the inflation rate was a painful 11 percent, before rising in April.

Politicians are mostly quiet about the boom.

“Republicans are not anxious to give President Biden credit for anything,” said Mr. Baker, the economist. “The Democrats could boast about how many people have gotten jobs, and the strong wage growth at the bottom, but they seem reluctant to do this, knowing that many people are being hit by inflation.”

The initial coronavirus outbreak ended the longest U.S. economic expansion in modern history after 128 months. A dramatic downturn began. The federal government stepped in, generously spreading cash around. Spending habits shifted as people stayed home. The recession ended after two months, and the boom resumed.

Jerome H. Powell, the Federal Reserve chair, recently warned that there were too many employers chasing too few workers, saying the labor market was “tight to an unhealthy level.” But for workers, it’s gratifying to have the upper hand in looking for a new position or career.

“Both my husband and I have been able to make job changes that have doubled our income from five years ago,” said Lindsay Bernhagen, 39, who lives in Stevens Point, Wis., and works for a start-up. “It feels like it has mostly been dumb luck.”

A decade ago, the housing market was in chaos. Between 2007 and 2015, more than seven million homes were lost to foreclosure, according to Black Knight. Some of these were speculative purchases or second homes, but many were primary residences. Egged on by lenders, people lived in houses they could not easily afford.

Now the reverse is true. People own much more of their homes than they used to, while the banks own less. That acts as a shield against foreclosures, which in 2019 were only 144,000, according to Black Knight. (During the pandemic, foreclosures mostly ceased due to moratoriums.)

The equity available to homeowners reached nearly \$10 trillion at the end of 2021, double what it was at the height of the 2006 bubble, according to Black Knight. For the average American mortgage holder, that amounts to \$185,000 before hitting loan-to-value tripwires. The figure is up \$48,000 in a year — about what the average American family earns annually, according to some estimates.

Even very new homeowners feel an economic boost.

“We never had enough for a down payment, but then in summer of 2020, we got a good tax return, a stimulus check and had a little money in the bank,” said Magaly Pena, 41, an architect for the federal government. She and her husband bought a townhouse in the Miami suburb of Homestead.

Ms. Pena, a first-generation immigrant from Nicaragua, likes to check out the estimated value of her house and her neighbors on the real estate website Redfin. “Sometimes I’ll check it every day for three days,” she said. “It’s been crazy — everything has skyrocketed.”

In 2006, homeowners cashed in their equity. Sometimes they used the money to double down on another house or two. In 2022, there’s little sense of excess. One reason is that lenders and the culture in general are no longer so encouraging about that sort of refinancing. But owners are also more cautious.

Brian Carter, an epidemiologist in Atlanta, said he and his wife, Desiree, had about \$250,000 in equity in their home but didn't plan to draw on it.

"I was 27 in 2007 and watched a lot of people lose their houses because they couldn't leave their equity alone," he said. "That included my next-door neighbor and the family across the street. I don't want to worry."

Those who take a boom for granted often get upstaged by reality. In May 2000, the entrepreneur Kurt Andersen said raising money for a media start-up called Inside was as easy "as getting laid in 1969." That was a few weeks after the stock market peaked. Seventeen months and one merger later, Inside shut down. (Mr. Andersen clarified in an email that he did not actually have sex until the 1970s.)

In 2000, the start-up downturn was the first sign of wider economic trouble. This time it may be simply that people are doing too well. "U.S. households in best shape in 30 years ... but does it matter?" Deutsche Bank asked in a research note last month.

Its logic: Households have more cash than debt for the first time in decades, which is theoretically good. But all that money is encouraging spending, which is propelling inflation, which is forcing the Fed to push up interest rates. The result: a recession late next year.

Ashley Humphries, 31, feels prepared for most any scenario. Six years ago, she was a graduate teaching assistant making \$12,000 a year. Now she earns a low six figures as a senior product manager for a parking app developer in Atlanta.

"I've lived out some childhood dreams like dyeing my hair vibrant colors and seeing 'Phantom of the Opera' from the front row," Ms. Humphries said. She got a dog named Kylo, put a bit of her income in the stock market and bought a Tesla. She just left on a Caribbean cruise. Two of them, in fact, one after the other.

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HEADLINE	05/11 Gas prices high; stay high for long time?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/11/energy/record-gas-price-causes/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a major reason that US drivers are paying record prices for gasoline. But it's not the only cause of the spike.</p> <p>Numerous factors are pushing prices up, with regular gasoline hitting a record \$4.40 a gallon Wednesday according to AAA's survey.</p> <p>Gas prices were already expected to breach the \$4 a gallon mark for the first time since 2008, with or without shots fired in Eastern Europe or economic sanctions imposed on Russia.</p> <p>The good news for drivers is that crude oil prices have been falling in recent days, amid concerns that China keeping Covid lockdowns in place to combat will continue to hurt oil demand. Gas prices could be near their highest point for the month, said Tom Kloza, global head of energy analysis for the Oil Price Information Service, which tracks gas prices for AAA.</p> <p>But prices aren't likely to fall much whenever they do start to retreat. And Kloza expects they could once again set a record after schools let out and drivers start hitting the road for vacations next month.</p> <p>The national average price could easily hit \$4.50 a gallon or even higher this summer, he believes. "Anything goes from June 20 to Labor Day," Kloza said.</p> <p>Here's what's behind the record price surge:</p> <p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine</p>

Russia is one of the [largest oil exporters](#) on the planet. In December it sent nearly 8 million barrels of oil and other petroleum products to global markets, 5 million of them as crude oil.

Very little of that went to the United States. In 2021 Europe got 60% of the oil and 20% went to China. But oil is priced on global commodity markets, so the loss of Russian oil affects prices around the globe no matter where it is used.

The concerns about disrupting global markets led Western nations to initially [exempt Russian oil and natural gas from the sanctions](#) they put in place to protest the invasion.

But in March the United States announced a [formal ban on all Russian energy imports](#). The UK government, too, said it will [phase out Russian oil imports](#) by the end of 2022 and also explore ways to end natural gas imports. And [Germany](#) announced earlier this month it will support an [EU ban on Russian oil](#). Russia's oil is slowly and steadily being [removed from global markets](#).

Less oil and gas from other sources

Oil prices plunged when pandemic-related stay-at-home orders around the world crushed demand in the spring of 2020, and crude [briefly traded at negative prices](#). In response, OPEC and its allies, including Russia, [agreed to slash production](#) as a way to support prices. And even when demand returned sooner than expected, they [kept production targets low](#).

US oil companies don't adhere to those types of nationally mandated production targets. But they have been [reluctant or unable to resume producing oil](#) at pre-pandemic levels amid concerns that [tougher environmental rules](#) could cut future demand. Many of those stricter rules have been scaled back or failed to become law.

"The Biden administration is suddenly interested in more drilling, not less," Robert McNally, president of consulting firm Rapidan Energy Group, said earlier this spring. "People are more worried about high oil prices than anything else."

It takes time to scale up production, particularly when oil companies are facing the same [supply chain](#) and [hiring challenges](#) as thousands of other US businesses.

"They can't find people, and can't find equipment," McNally added. "It's not like they're available at a premium price. They're just not available."

Oil stocks have generally lagged the broader market over the last two years, at least until the recent run-up in prices. Oil company executives would rather find ways to boost their share price than increase production.

"Oil and gas companies do not want to drill more," Pavel Molchanov, an analyst at Raymond James, said earlier this spring. "They are under pressure from the financial community to pay more dividends, to do more share buybacks, instead of the proverbial 'drill baby drill,' which is the way they would have done things 10 years ago. Corporate strategy has fundamentally changed."

One of the starkest examples: ExxonMobil ([XOM](#)) last month announced first quarter profits of \$8.8 billion, more than triple the level of a year ago when excluding special items. It also announced a [\\$30 billion share repurchase plan](#), far more than the \$21 billion to \$24 billion it expects to spend on all capital investment, including searching for new oil.

Not only is oil production [lagging behind](#) pre-pandemic levels, US refining capacity is falling. Today, about 1 million fewer barrels of oil a day are available to be processed into gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other petroleum-based products.

State and federal environmental rules are prompting some refineries to switch from oil to lower carbon renewable fuels. Some companies are closing older refineries rather than investing what it would cost to

retool to keep them operating, especially with massive new refineries set to open overseas in Asia, the Middle East and Africa in 2023.

And the fact that diesel and jet fuel prices are up far more than gasoline prices shows that refiners are shifting more of their production to those products.

"Economics mandate you make more jet and diesel fuel to the detriment of gasoline," said Kloza.

Strong demand for gas

But supply is only part of the equation for prices. Demand is the other key, and while it's very strong right now, it's still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

The US economy had [record job growth](#) in 2021, and while those [gains](#) have slowed, they remain historically strong. Demand is getting another boost as the many employees who have been working from home for much of the last two years [return to the office](#).

The start of the summer travel season on Memorial Day weekend is likely to spark the typical annual increases in demand for gas and jet fuel. US airlines all report [very strong bookings](#) for summer travel, even with airfares climbing above pre-pandemic levels.

The end of the Omicron surge and the removal of many Covid restrictions is encouraging people to get out of the house for more shopping, entertainment and travel. US trips in passenger vehicles have increased 10% since the beginning of this year, according to the mobility research firm Inrix.

Commuting may remain down slightly. Many who plan to return to the office will be there only three or four days a week, and the total number of jobs is still slightly below 2019 levels. But there will be periods, most likely this summer, with higher demand for gas than during comparable periods before the pandemic, Kloza predicts.

"Even before Ukraine, I was expecting to break the record," Kloza said. "Now it's a question of how much we break the record by."

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HEADLINE	05/10 Russian troops deteriorating morale
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/putins-troops-finally-realize-theyve-been-hung-out-to-dry-intercepted-call-from-ukraine-suggests?ref=home
GIST	<p>Nearly three months after Vladimir Putin unleashed his "special military operation" against Ukraine and a day after his less-than-triumphant Victory Day speech, a series of intercepted phone calls and radio traffic suggest the "idiocy" of his war is finally becoming too much to bear for even his own troops.</p> <p>In perhaps the most dramatic audio to emerge, Russian crew members onboard a Raptor-class landing assault boat near Snake Island in the Black Sea appear to have been caught in radio transmissions desperately lamenting their lack of air support as Ukrainian forces bombarded them from an armed Bayraktar drone.</p> <p>The audio, released on Telegram by the investigative news outlet InformNapalm, purportedly comes from open radio traffic during battles in the Black Sea that took place over the weekend, when Ukraine's military said it had destroyed three "enemy" boats that subsequently wound up "on the bottom of the sea."</p> <p>"Where is air support? Where is air support?" a man, identified as a Russian crew member, can be heard saying frantically amid what sounds like sirens in the background.</p> <p>"This Bayraktar is already pissing me the ***** off," the man says, before apparently becoming more desperate as he says, "They have fired a fourth missile at us! A fourth missile!"</p>

Despite the man's pleas, the Russian service member on the other end simply promises to "pass along" the information to military leadership. It was not immediately clear if the man in the recording was on any of the three boats that Ukrainian authorities say they sank.

But the frustration in the recording has been echoed in other intercepted communications that purportedly capture Russian service members serving in other parts of Ukraine.

Ukraine's Security Service released a [minute-long recording](#) Tuesday that it said was an intercepted phone call between a Russian soldier based in the Kharkiv region and his father back home. The soldier could not hold back his anger at his own commander, who he claimed had abandoned the fight to let the men in his unit serve as cannon fodder.

"They're standing there, they're under fire, and the commander just goes, 'Don't back down!' While he's somewhere sitting on a couch, drinking, probably," the young man says.

"They can **** off with this war," the soldier's father replies, unleashing a stream of curse words over the "idiocy" of the war and the propaganda shown on Russian state TV.

"I can't wrap my head around it," he says, adding, "They tell us every morning on TV about these new weapons that all of Ukraine supposedly saw and got scared of."

Advising his son to refuse to take part in the war any further, he rails against the "worthless rat" and "****ing scum" of a commander before the conversation ends.

The rapidly deteriorating morale among Russian troops comes as no surprise to many military experts, who say Moscow began the war with a flawed understanding of Ukraine's military capabilities and an erroneous belief that nothing had changed since the Kremlin first seized territory in 2014.

Even a former Wagner Group mercenary who previously fought for Russia in Ukraine has spoken out to publicly call the war a "mistake."

Marat Gabidullin, a member of the shadowy, Kremlin-linked mercenary group until 2019, told [Reuters](#) he was asked to rejoin the fight after the invasion on Feb. 24, but he refused because he knew it would be a mess.

"They were caught completely by surprise that the Ukrainian army resisted so fiercely and that they faced the actual army," he was quoted saying, adding that Russian forces "did not learn how to fight for real."

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HEADLINE	05/11 WHO: zero-Covid approach not sustainable
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/shanghai-reaffirms-covid-sustainable-84636997
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- Shanghai reaffirmed Wednesday it would maintain the "zero-COVID" approach to eliminate a waning outbreak in China's largest city after the head of the World Health Organization said it was not sustainable and urged China to change strategies.</p> <p>While progress has been made, relaxing prevention and control measures could allow the virus to rebound, deputy director of Shanghai's Center for Disease Control Wu Huanyu told reporters.</p> <p>"At the same time, now is also the most difficult and critical moment for our city to achieve zero-COVID," Wu said at a daily briefing.</p> <p>"Should we relax our vigilance, the epidemic may rebound, so it is necessary to persistently implement the prevention and control work without relaxing," he said.</p>

Wu gave no indication he was aware of the comments by WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who said he had discussing with Chinese experts the need to change to a new approach in light of new knowledge about the virus.

“When we talk about the ‘zero-COVID,’ we don’t think that it’s sustainable, considering the behavior of the virus now and what we anticipate in the future,” Tedros said at a news briefing Tuesday.

“And especially when we have now a good knowledge, understanding of the virus and when we have good tools to use, transitioning to another strategy will be very important,” he said.

Tedros was joined by Mike Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief, who said all pandemic control actions should “show due respect to individual and human rights.”

Countries need to “balance the control measures, the impact on society, the impact on the economy. That is not always an easy calibration to make,” Ryan said.

China's ruling Communist Party has strictly controlled all discussion about its controversial approach, which aims to totally stamp out outbreaks, and said it would tolerate no criticism. The entirely state-controlled media did not report on the comments by Tedros and Ryan and references to them on the Chinese internet appeared to have been removed by censors.

The ruthless and often chaotic implementation of zero-COVID has stirred considerable resentment in Shanghai, where some residents have been under lockdown for more than a month. As of Wednesday, more than 2 million people in the city remained confined to their residential compounds, while restrictions had been slightly relaxed for most of the other 23 million.

However, the easing appears to now be on hold, even as the number of new cases falls in the city that is home to China's busiest port, main stock market and thousands of Chinese and foreign firms.

Teams in white protective suits have begun entering the homes of infected people to spray disinfectant, prompting worries about damage to property. Residents have in some cases been ordered to leave their keys with a community volunteer when they are taken to quarantine so disinfectant workers can get in, a new requirement that has no apparent legal basis.

People in some areas have been ordered to stay home again after having been let out for limited shopping in recent weeks. On Tuesday, service was suspended on the last two subway lines that were still operating.

Complaints have centered on shortages of food and other daily necessities and the forced removal of thousands of people to quarantine centers after having tested positive or having been in contact with an infected person, standard procedure in China’s zero-COVID approach.

Along with the human cost, the adherence to “zero-COVID” as many other countries loosen restrictions and try to live with the virus is exacting a growing economic toll.

However, the party under leader Xi Jinping shows no sign of backing off amid efforts to ensure stability and shore up its authority ahead of a major party congress this fall.

Chinese experts such as Wu have been careful to toe the party line, saying the strategy has been effective in limiting the official death toll in mainland China to slightly over 5,000 over the course of the entire pandemic, according to the government's National Health Commission, and that any let-up risks sparking a major new surge.

Ryan gave China's death toll as just over 15,000 and the Johns Hopkins University of Medicine Coronavirus Resource center offers a figure of 14,538. Those figures combine mainland China's deaths with those in the semi-autonomous region of Hong Kong, which has recorded almost 10,000 fatalities despite tight restrictions, and in self-governing Taiwan, which is excluded from the WHO and other

	<p>United Nations organizations and has recorded nearly 1,000 COVID deaths under a more relaxed approach.</p> <p>The daily number of new cases in Shanghai reported on Wednesday had fallen to less than 1,500, down from a peak of 26,000 in mid-April. Seven more COVID-19-related deaths were reported, raising the toll from the outbreak to 560.</p> <p>While China says more than 88% of its population is fully vaccinated, the rate is considerably lower among the vulnerable elderly. Questions have also been raised about the efficacy of Chinese-produced vaccines compared to those from Europe and the United States.</p> <p>In the capital Beijing, residents have been ordered to undergo mass testing in a bid to prevent a major outbreak like that in Shanghai. The city, which reported 37 new cases on Wednesday, has locked down individual buildings and residential compounds, shut about 60 subway stations and banned dining at restaurants, allowing only takeout and delivery.</p> <p>The vast Forbidden City museum complex, the ancient home of China's former emperors, will also be closing from Thursday to "reduce the danger of virus transmission in society posed by the circulation of people," it said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Alcohol deaths dramatic rise in pandemic
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/alcohol-deaths-increase-dramatically-pandemic-younger-adults-research/story?id=84496498
GIST	<p>Martin's drinking started early.</p> <p>In elementary school, his father would offer swigs of Budweiser in the car during their daily pilgrimage from Pomona to Hollywood, California to pick up his mother from cosmetology class, he told ABC News.</p> <p>Decades later, after churning through dozens of jobs, Martin—who spoke under the condition of anonymity to protect his privacy—found himself in the pandemic's crosshairs.</p> <p>Seven days into a gig as a short-order chef, in March 2020, his restaurant shut down and the 44-year old began quarantining with his family. Martin said he tried desperately to abstain from drinking—he adored helping his arthritic mother with chores around the house—but the pandemic only deepened his underlying alcoholism.</p> <p>"All I ever knew about how to spend my time was to get drunk," Martin told ABC News, "and I had more of my time than ever before."</p> <p>In September, his family kicked him out. Two months later, he was passing out cold on the street, he recalled.</p> <p>Americans had been drinking more for years ahead of the pandemic. But as COVID forced people to lock down, these patterns only intensified.</p> <p>New research shows that deaths caused by alcohol shot up, too. And younger Americans -- people in their late 20s, 30s and early 40s -- were the hardest hit.</p> <p>Struggling to cope with pandemic stressors</p> <p>That extra glass of merlot was driven in part by people's attempts to cope with unprecedented circumstances, Anusha Chandrakanthan, a psychiatrist at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center, told ABC News.</p>

“Social isolation, along with fear of the unknown, have always been major triggers for our patients,” Chandrakanthan added.

At the same time, alcohol became easier to get than ever, said Dr. Sara Polley, a psychiatrist and the medical director at Hazelden Betty Ford, a national addiction treatment organization that also runs residential centers.

Relaxed alcohol-delivery laws meant people could order merlots, stouts or vodka to their homes across the country. There, they could pour uninhibited by open tabs or last calls, Polley added.

Heightened stressors, plus ease of access, led to Americans purchasing alcohol at the greatest rate in decades, according to IWSR, an alcohol research organization.

By winter 2021, hospitals around the country reported that alcohol-related admissions increased up to 50% compared to prior years. Hospitalizations leapt higher still during intermittent stay-at-home orders.

Increases in deaths particularly high in young adults

New data now shows that alcohol deaths, which are defined as those where alcohol use disorder is a cause of death on death certificates, have skyrocketed as well.

A study published this week found that deaths rates surged by 25% in 2020. They stayed high in 2021—21% above the pre-pandemic baseline—a figure equating to tens of thousands of deaths.

The research builds on data from March that likewise showed increases in alcohol-related deaths. It also reinforced another finding: young adults were hit the hardest.

The observation may reflect a sea change in how younger Americans view alcohol, Aaron White, chief of epidemiology and biometry at the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, told ABC News.

“Our kids are, on average, drinking less,” he told ABC News, “but they’re drinking alone more when they do—and they’re drinking in combination with drugs.”

Drinking alongside drugs can be particularly deadly. Historically, one out of every seven opioid deaths also involve alcohol. As opioids overwhelm the country, deaths involving both are only accelerating.

The toll may be higher than we know

And bad as the alcohol death data look, they may actually underestimate the toll, White told ABC News.

Since death certificates rely on examiners’ judgment, not all may screen for alcohol or attribute the death to alcohol if it’s detected.

White points to gaps between death certificates and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data as evidence: about ten thousand deaths due to drinking and driving captured by NHTSA—fully 90%—were not reflected on death certificates in 2020.

“We know for certain that deaths due to alcohol are undercounted,” White told ABC News, “so, the question is, what’s the true number? And really, we have no idea.”

Will the trend continue?

Whether the mortality spikes are a blip or a trend remains up for debate.

Some experts, like Polley, are hopeful they’ll resolve “as peoples’ lives get slowly but surely back to normal,” she told ABC News.

	<p>Others are more concerned. “All the data says to me that we’re fraying at the edges,” White told ABC News.</p> <p>At Hazelden Betty Ford, admissions to its residential programs—including its center for young adults—have reached record highs in 2022.</p> <p>“I don’t see anything to say we’re moving in a better direction,” White told ABC News, “at least, not yet.”</p> <p>Martin, for his part, is hopeful the pandemic can mean a new beginning.</p> <p>“That popping sound of that first beer, it used to literally be music to my ears—but not anymore,” he told ABC News. He found a rare room at a rehab in Long Beach, and he said he's been faithfully attending AA meetings.</p> <p>“Now, I just want to see a new me,” he told ABC News, “a me that’s old, sober, and can be there for my mom.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Breakthrough Covid deaths increase
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/breakthrough-deaths-comprise-increasing-proportion-died-covid-19/story?id=84627182
GIST	<p>A growing proportion of COVID-19 deaths are occurring among the vaccinated, a new ABC News analysis of federal data shows.</p> <p>In August of 2021, about 18.9% of COVID-19 deaths occurred among the vaccinated. Six months later, in February 2022, that proportional percent of deaths had increased to more than 40%.</p> <p>Comparatively, in September 2021, just 1.1% of COVID-19 deaths occurred among Americans who had been fully vaccinated and boosted with their first dose. By February 2022, that percentage had increased to about 25%.</p> <p>Experts said the increase in breakthrough deaths is expected with more Americans reaching full vaccination status.</p> <p>"These data should not be interpreted as vaccines not working. In fact, these real-world analyses continue to reaffirm the incredible protection these vaccines afford especially when up to date with boosters," said Dr. John Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston Children's Hospital and an ABC News contributor.</p> <p>In addition, many vulnerable Americans are more than one year out from their primary vaccinations and have yet to receive booster doses.</p> <p>To date, more than 220 million Americans have been fully vaccinated, 100 million of whom have received their first COVID-19 booster. However, about 91.5 million eligible Americans — about half of those currently eligible — have yet to receive their first booster shot.</p> <p>The increase in breakthrough deaths comes as a growing proportion of older Americans enter the hospital for COVID-19 related care.</p> <p>Last summer, after more vulnerable, older populations had been vaccinated, the share of Americans ages 65 years and older in the hospital had dipped to a pandemic low — with younger populations representing the largest age groups of people in need of care. However, throughout the omicron surge, the average age of those in the hospital with COVID-19 has steadily gotten older again.</p>

More than 90% of seniors have been fully vaccinated, but a third of them have yet to receive their first booster shot. Even with overall high vaccination rates in older populations, in recent months, during the omicron surge, 73% of deaths have been among those 65 and older.

Health experts said vaccines and boosters continue to provide significant protection against severe disease. However, waning immunity re-emphasizes the urgency of boosting older Americans and high-risk Americans with additional doses.

"This trend in increased risk among the elderly further supports the need for community wide immunization. Older populations, especially those with underlying conditions, continue to be at great risk of severe complications, especially as immunity wanes. The best way to protect them is to make sure everyone around them is fully immunized," Brownstein said.

All Americans over the age of 50, immunocompromised people over the age of 12, and people who received two doses of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine, are currently eligible for a second booster.

Approximately 10.5 million people in the U.S. have received their second booster dose.

"Given the fact that immunity is waning, we've got to get people boosted," Dr. Anthony Fauci told GBH News's Boston Public Radio on Monday.

In February, unvaccinated adults were 10 times more likely to die of COVID-19 compared to vaccinated individuals and five times more likely to require hospitalization, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Compared to fully vaccinated and boosted adults, unvaccinated people were about 20 times more likely to die of COVID-19 and seven times more likely to require hospitalization.

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HEADLINE	05/10 TSA expands screeners at busy airports
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/tsa-expanding-screeners-busy-airports-84631909
GIST	<p>COPPELL, Texas -- The chief of the Transportation Security Administration said Tuesday that his agency has quadrupled the number of employees who could bolster screening operations at airports that become too crowded this summer.</p> <p>TSA Administrator David Pekoske said nearly 1,000 employees have volunteered to be sent to other airports if needed.</p> <p>It's part of the agency's plan for handling what is projected to be a frenetic vacation-travel season.</p> <p>"We expect this to be a busy summer, and we are as ready as we possibly can be," Pekoske said at a news conference near Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. "We're likely going to exceed in some airports by good measure the 2019 numbers."</p> <p>Pekoske said TSA — which has 47,500 screeners — tries to predict when wait times in the standard checkpoint lanes will be at least 30 minutes, or when waits for PreCheck travelers will be at least 10 minutes. When that happens, he said, volunteers from less-crowded airports will be sent to help reduce the waits at busy airports.</p> <p>The TSA has screened, on average, more than 2.1 million travelers per day in April and May. That is about 90% as many people as it screened in the same stretch of 2019.</p> <p>Airlines are expecting summer crowds to be similar to 2019, when more than 2.5 million people per day streamed through U.S. airport checkpoints.</p>

	Airlines have posted ambitious schedules for the summer vacation months, although some have recently trimmed those plans out of fear that they won't have enough employees to operate every flight. Also, international travel is still far below pre-pandemic levels.
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HEADLINE	05/10 Alarm: uncertain Ukraine war endgame
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/us-western-europe-fret-uncertain-ukraine-war-endgame-84636540
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- An interminable and unwinnable war in Europe? That's what NATO leaders fear and are bracing for as Russia's war in Ukraine grinds into its third month with little sign of a decisive military victory for either side and no resolution in sight.</p> <p>The possibility of a stalemate is fueling concerns that Ukraine may remain a deadly European battlefield and a source of continental and global instability for months, or even years, to come.</p> <p>Energy and food security are the most immediate worries, but massive Western support for Ukraine while the world is still emerging from coronavirus pandemic and struggling to deal with the effects of climate change could deepen the toll on the global economy. And should Russia choose to escalate, the risk of a broader conflict rises.</p> <p>The U.S. and its allies are pumping a steady stream of lethal weaponry into Ukraine to keep it in the fight. While most analysts say Kyiv is holding its own at the least, those infusions must continue if they are to support President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's vow to win, or at least continue to match or beat back, Moscow's advances.</p> <p>Just as Russian President Vladimir Putin has not signaled a willingness to intensify the invasion with either a general mobilization of troops or the use of unconventional arms, neither has he shown any sign of backing down. Nor has Zelenskyy, who is now asserting that Ukraine will not only beat back the current Russian invasion but regain control of Crimea and other areas that Russia has occupied or otherwise controlled since 2014.</p> <p>"It's very difficult to see how you could get a negotiated solution at this point," said Ian Kelly, a retired veteran diplomat who served as U.S. ambassador to Georgia, another former Soviet republic on which Russia has territorial designs.</p> <p>"There's no way that Ukraine is going to step back," Kelly said. "They think they're gonna win."</p> <p>At the same time, Kelly said that no matter how many miscalculations Putin has made about the strength and will of Ukraine to resist or the unity and resolve of the NATO allies, Putin cannot accept defeat or anything short of a scenario that he can claim has achieved success.</p> <p>"It would be political suicide for Putin to withdraw," Kelly said. "It's very difficult to see how you could get a negotiated solution at this point. Neither side is willing to stop fighting and probably the likeliest outcome is a war that lasts a couple of years. Ukraine would be a festering sore in the middle of Europe."</p> <p>U.S. officials, starting with President Joe Biden, seem to agree, even after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin raised eyebrows by saying after a visit to Kyiv last month that Washington's goal is not only to help Ukraine defend itself but to "weaken" Russia to the point where it does not pose a threat.</p> <p>Putin "doesn't have a way out right now, and I'm trying to figure out what we do about that," Biden said on Monday even after he signed legislation designed to reboot the World War II-era "lend-lease" program and appealed to Congress to approve a \$40 billion package of military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine.</p> <p>So what to do? French President Emmanuel Macron has placed a premium on a negotiated settlement that saves face for both Russia and Ukraine.</p>

“We will have a peace to build tomorrow, let us never forget that,” Macron said on Monday. “We will have to do this with Ukraine and Russia around the table. The end of the discussion and the negotiation will be set by Ukraine and Russia. But it will not be done in denial, nor in exclusion of each other, nor even in humiliation.”

U.S. officials aren't so sure, although they allow that the endgame is up to Ukraine.

“Our strategy is to see to it that Ukraine emerges from this victorious,” State Department spokesman Ned Price said this week. “Ukraine will do so at the negotiating table. Our goal is to strengthen Ukraine’s position at that negotiating table as we continue to place mounting costs on the Russian Federation.”

But, the high-stakes uncertainty over what constitutes a “victorious” Ukraine has alarmed officials in some European capitals, notably those in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which are NATO members bordering Russia and especially worried about Moscow's possible future intentions.

For Baltic nations and other countries on NATO's eastern flank, the threat is real and memories of Soviet occupation and rule remain fresh. Concessions to Russia in Ukraine will only embolden Putin to push further west, they say.

“To be honest, we are still not talking about the endgame,” Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis lamented to the The Associated Press in an interview on Monday. He said any territorial concessions in Ukraine would usher in a world where the “rules-based order” has been replaced by a “jungle rules-based order.”

Landsbergis suggested that Western nations issue public statements about what success would be. “Where we would consider what we would take for victory, actual victory? What would be the scenario that we would like?”

Landsbergis has been outspoken in calls for Putin to be ousted as Russia’s leader, going well beyond the U.S. position and that of other NATO leaders. He says regime change in Moscow is the only way to protect European and Western security in the long term.

“Coming from me it’s much easier to say we need regime change in Russia, so we’ve been quite blunt and open about it,” he said. “Maybe for United States it’s much more much more difficult to be open about it, but still, at some point we have to talk about this because it’s so important.”

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HEADLINE	05/10 DNI: Putin preparing ‘prolonged conflict’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/putin-prepping-prolonged-conflict-donbas-escalate-nuclear-threats/story?id=84626300
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin is preparing for a "prolonged conflict" in Ukraine, and could resort to drastic measures if the fighting doesn't go his way, according to Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines.</p> <p>During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Tuesday, Haines said Putin's invasion of Ukraine has sent a shock through the geopolitical order, "with implications for the future that we are only beginning to understand, but are sure to be consequential."</p> <p>Though Putin has focused his forces on Donbas after failing in the north, the U.S. does not believe he will be content with the eastern part of the country, Haines said.</p> <p>"The next month or two of fighting will be significant as the Russians attempt to reinvigorate their efforts. But even if they are successful, we are not confident that the fight in the Donbas will effectively end the war," she said. "We assess President Putin is preparing for prolonged conflict in Ukraine during which he still intends to achieve goals beyond the Donbas."</p>

But for now Putin's goal is to take control of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Donbas and encircle Ukrainian forces from the north and south "in order to crush the most capable and well-equipped Ukrainian forces who are fighting to hold the line in the East," Haines said.

Putin would also like to "consolidate control of the land bridge Russia has established from Crimea to the Donbas, occupy Kherson, and control the water source for Crimea," she said.

The U.S. also sees signs his military wants to extend that land bridge to Transnistria, in Moldova, according to Haines.

Haines said Russia might be capable of achieving "most" of those goals in the coming months, but would need to mobilize more troops to achieve the last:

"We believe that they will not be able to extend control over a land bridge that stretches to Transnistria and includes Odessa without launching some form of mobilization. And it is increasingly unlikely that they will be able to establish control over both oblasts and the buffer zone they desire in the coming weeks," Haines said.

But Putin is "probably counting on U.S. and EU resolve to weaken as food shortages, inflation, energy prices get worse," she added.

Economic forces are at work in Russia as well, with sanctions from the West having a "pretty significant" impact on Russia, according to Haines.

"Among the indicators that one might look at are, for example, the fact that ... we predict approximately 20% inflation in Russia, that we expect that their GDP will fall about 10%, possibly even more, over the course of the year," she said.

The fighting itself has also worn on Russia's capabilities.

"Our view is that the ground combat forces have been degraded considerably. It's going to take them years ... to rebuild that," she said.

But degraded conventional forces could drive Putin to other means of exerting force.

"That may end up meaning that they have greater reliance in effect on asymmetric tools during this period," Haines said. "So they may rely more on things like cyber, nuclear, precision, etc. And that's obviously a shift in the way in which they are exercising their efforts for influence."

The discrepancy between Putin's high aspirations and his degraded conventional capability could lead to "a more unpredictable and potentially escalatory trajectory," and "a period of more ad-hoc decision making in Russia" in the next few months, Haines said.

This could also manifest itself domestically.

"The current trend increases the likelihood that President Putin will turn to more drastic means, including imposing martial law, reorienting industrial production, or potentially escalatory military actions to free up the resources needed to achieve his objectives as the conflict drags on, or if he perceives Russia is losing in Ukraine," she said.

What could happen next?

"The most likely flashpoints for escalation in the coming weeks are around increasing Russian attempts to interdict Western security assistance, retaliation for Western economic sanctions or threats to the regime at home. We believe that Moscow continues to use nuclear rhetoric to deter the United States and the West

	<p>from increasing lethal aid to Ukraine and to respond to public comments of the U.S. and NATO allies that suggest expanded Western goals in the conflict," she said.</p> <p>The next step for Putin could be to launch major nuclear drills to command respect from the U.S.</p> <p>"If Putin perceives that the United States is ignoring his threats, he may try to signal to Washington the heightened danger of its support to Ukraine by authorizing another large nuclear exercise involving a major dispersal of mobile intercontinental missiles, heavy bombers, strategic submarines," Haines said.</p> <p>But so far U.S. officials have said they do not believe Russia is preparing to actually use nuclear weapons in Ukraine or elsewhere.</p> <p>"We otherwise continue to believe that President Putin would probably only authorize the use of nuclear weapons if he perceived an existential threat to the Russian state or regime," Haines said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Red flag warnings 6 states in Southwest
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/temperatures-soar-20-degrees-normal-wildfires-burn-southwest/story?id=84619509
GIST	<p>Fire danger is back down to critical after reaching extreme levels on Monday, but red flag warnings continue across six states in the Southwest, from Nevada to Oklahoma.</p> <p>More than a dozen wildfires continued to burn on Tuesday across the region. The San Rafael fire in Arizona is 12% contained over 11,000 acres. The Hermit Creek and Calf Canyon fires are 39% contained over 200,000 acres.</p> <p>Low humidity, gusty winds and dry brush continue to pose a high risk for fire to spread.</p> <p>Above-normal heat has also spread into the Midwest, with temperatures soaring 20 degrees or more above average on Tuesday.</p> <p>Even as far north as Des Moines, Iowa, could see temperatures of 90 degrees, and Chicago could see temperatures in the mid-80s.</p> <p>Numerous record highs were reported across parts of the Plains and Midwest on Monday. Abilene, Texas, reached 103 degrees, a record high for the third day in a row.</p> <p>Temperatures were in the 90s from San Antonio to Kansas City on Monday. More record heat was expected Tuesday from Texas to Memphis, St. Louis and Kansas City.</p> <p>The heat will spread into parts of the eastern Great Lakes and parts of the inland Northeast by Thursday, as western New York and Pennsylvania could see possible record high temperatures.</p> <p>Temperatures in Syracuse, New York, could be in the 80s by Thursday, while temperatures from New York City to Philadelphia are expected to be in the 70s.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/09 Concern: Ukraine into US-Russia proxy war
SOURCE	https://thehill.com/news/administration/3482310-leaks-raise-concern-ukraine-will-spill-into-us-russia-proxy-war/
GIST	President Biden's commitment to support Ukraine in its defensive war against Russia is suddenly colliding with his push to avoid a direct confrontation with Moscow.

The president's reported dressing down of top military and intelligence officials for leaks that boasted of how U.S. intelligence helped Ukraine kill top Russian generals and sink a battleship underscores the tensions — and the fraying of the administration's messaging.

"The president was displeased with the leaks. His view was that it was an overstatement of our role, an inaccurate statement and also an understatement of the Ukrainians' role and their relationship, and he did not feel that they were constructive," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

Psaki did not confirm the details of Biden's remarks. Thomas Friedman in a column in The New York Times reported that the president had called the director of national intelligence, the director of the CIA and the secretary of Defense to warn them that such "loose talk" had to stop immediately "before we end up in an unintended war with Russia."

The administration has long taken steps to cast U.S. support for Ukraine as separate from a direct conflict with Moscow — even when the president himself has stepped out of line.

Biden has often stepped outside the boundaries of his official talking points — calling Russian President Vladimir Putin a war criminal who must surrender power. But his staff were quick to walk back those comments.

Hawkish supporters of Ukraine who have criticized the U.S. for holding back from delivering decisive, lethal military assistance have aided the narrative that the U.S. is taking steps to stop short of direct conflict with Moscow.

But that stance is viewed as increasingly untenable as the administration has doubled-down on its support by sending larger and longer-range weaponry and requesting Congress authorize \$33 billion in additional assistance to Ukraine.

Administration officials have shifted their rhetoric to more full-throated support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's stated goals, that Russia must be pushed back to its positions before the Feb. 24 invasion.

"The end state should be determined by the Ukrainians, as a sovereign independent country, we'll back that, we'll continue to back that however they choose to do it," Secretary of State Antony Blinken told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month after meeting face-to-face with Zelensky in Kyiv.

The secretary also sought to clarify remarks from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at the time that the U.S. objective was to see "Russia weakened," a statement that drew scrutiny as escalating rhetoric against Moscow.

Blinken said it is important that the U.S. strategy is "making sure, in various ways, that Russia does not have the effective means" to invade Ukraine again.

Foreign policy experts said the U.S. is taking a risk by showing less caution of becoming embroiled in a drawn-out conflict with a nuclear-armed Moscow. They also said the U.S. may be flexing given perceptions about Moscow's own weaknesses.

"I think there is far greater risk tolerance for Russian escalation, and I think it comes back to the fact that the Russians have underperformed, and that has given us added confidence about how far we can push," said Trita Parsi, executive vice president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

Parsi said it is a positive signal that the president has reportedly pulled back his officials from speaking too freely about how the U.S. has helped weaken Russia's assault, but he called for more clarity on the scope of the administration's strategy.

“I do see a trajectory that I think is worrisome,” he added. “There needs to be a bit more of a realization about what these risks are and what we’re doing to minimize those risks.”

Eugene Finkel, associate professor of international affairs at Johns Hopkins University, said Putin has long viewed the war in Ukraine as a proxy battle between Russia and the U.S. and NATO.

“We’re not at the stage where rhetoric on its own can do more damage,” Finkel said, adding that speculation that Putin would pronounce new objectives in Ukraine or a widening of the war during his Victory Day speech in Moscow on Monday failed to materialize.

But Finkel said Biden’s signing of legislation on Monday that would allow the U.S. to more quickly supply military aid to Ukraine “might obviously affect Russian attitudes.”

The risk of Putin using nuclear weapons in Ukraine is present but low, at least so far, said Shannon Bugos, senior policy analyst with the Arms Control Association.

Both sides have taken steps to maintain stability, including statements from U.S. and NATO officials that the allies’ nuclear posture has not changed and Russia’s advanced warning to the U.S. that it was testing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) last month.

Bugos added that Russia has not moved its mobile ICBMs, which would signal that the Kremlin was preparing an immediate nuclear strike.

An important concern is whether the U.S. and Russia can revive the Strategic Stability Dialogue, a framework for both Washington and Moscow to set out clear communication to avoid a nuclear confrontation and engage on arms control issues.

The dialogue was suspended after Russia invaded Ukraine, and Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins said on April 4 that “we’re just not in a position where we can have those kind of discussions.”

Bugos said the administration has not laid out what it would take to resume those discussions.

“It was understandable the dialogue was paused but also at the same time, I can see the possibility of it being revived in the coming weeks or months, because there is that guiding principle of, they both do not want to start nuclear war,” she said.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Baby formula shortage worsens in WA
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/western-washington-families-feel-squeeze-formula-shortage-state-faces-40-out-of-stock-rate/F2ZC3MPZR5EZRIX3J7B7SQ6QJ/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The nationwide baby formula shortage continues to worsen, leaving families to try to find ways to stock up on limited supply.</p> <p>It’s an alarming trend in the state of Washington and beyond. Shelves are empty, online stock is low, and formula in general is hard to find.</p> <p>“I hope the solution comes up soon because it’s hard,” Jane Ndungu told KIRO7 from her home in south Everett. Having a low supply of breast milk, Ndungu has always supplemented her son’s diet with formula.</p> <p>Now she is doing everything she can, both in person and online, to try to keep her 11-month-old, Jeremy, fed.</p> <p>“It’s a guessing game,” she said, as she described how she currently goes about finding formula.</p>

Ndungu started noticing formula shelves were running bare at the beginning of April.

She visited five stores and came away empty-handed.

Then, she looked on Amazon and was able to find three cans of Similac, the formula her son takes. She paid \$157, which she said is at least \$30 over what she used to pay pre-shortage, but she didn't want to find herself without formula again, so she put in for a subscription to receive three cans per month at the elevated price.

But her next order never came.

"I received a message that they were out of stock and they couldn't find it anywhere," Ndungu said.

Now, nearly every day, she goes store-to-store to try to find more. Typically, Ndungu said she can find a small can, but it's not enough and it's expensive.

"It's frustrating, very frustrating because there's nothing you can do," Ndungu said.

Those frustrations are shared by thousands of [families currently impacted by the shortage](#).

According to [Datasembly](#), as of April 3, 2022, Washington was one of seven states experiencing an out-of-stock rate for formula that was higher than 40%, while the rest of the nation averaged 31%.

Then, in just three weeks, the nationwide average caught up to Washington. Recent projections from Datasembly now show 26 states are now struggling with a 40-50% deficit in supply.

"This is hard for all moms, and we need to look for a solution about how the supply can get better, because babies have to eat, babies have to have the formula, not all moms are able to breastfeed," Ndungu said.

[The shortages](#) have been caused by pandemic-related supply chain issues and [a recent recall](#).

On Tuesday, [the Food and Drug Administration](#) said it is already acting and working with manufacturers to try to increase production and output, while also helping to expedite imports.

A statement on the FDA's website reads in part:

"We recognize that many consumers have been unable to access infant formula and critical medical foods they are accustomed to using and are frustrated by their inability to do so. We are doing everything in our power to ensure there is adequate product available where and when they need it," said FDA commissioner Robert M. Califf. "Ensuring the availability of safe, sole-source nutrition products like infant formula is of the utmost importance to the FDA. Our teams have been working tirelessly to address and alleviate supply issues and will continue doing everything within our authority to ensure the production of safe infant formula products."

Still, retailers are left to stretch their already limited supply. Major retail chains like Target, CVS and Walgreens have placed purchasing limits on formula items.

In response to the shortage, parents are going to great lengths to find formula — even joining breastmilk and formula sharing Facebook groups to try to buy, sell or trade for supply.

Other parents are taking a DIY approach and attempting to make their own formula at home.

[In February 2021](#), the FDA warned parents not to create their own formula because it has not been evaluated by the FDA, may contain contaminants, and "may lack nutrients vital to an infant's growth."

The agency continued, saying, “the consequences could range from severe nutritional imbalances to foodborne illnesses, both of which can be life-threatening.”

Dr. Steven Abrams, former chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Nutrition, advises that the best option for parents or caregivers is to find a different formula that is most similar to the one your child currently takes.

If you don’t know which formula is the closest match, or if your baby needs a specialized formula, Abrams recommends speaking to your pediatrician.

He also asks parents to keep in mind that babies may get an upset stomach as they adjust to a formula change, but typically, that is something that they will get used to.

Milk banks have also caught wind of the shortage, although the service is typically reserved for hospitals and babies with medical needs.

“There are a lot of families that are quite worried,” said Joanne Ransom, nurse and clinical director for [Northwest Mothers Milk Bank](#), the only milk bank which services the Pacific Northwest.

Ransom said as the formula shortage continues, they expect to see an uptick in inquiries. And while they won’t be able to directly service everyone, they can help point families in the right direction.

“We will do what we can to help support families,” said Ransom. “It must be very frightening for them to not know how they are going to feed their babies.”

Ransom said as the shortage continues, she encourages women with a surplus of supply to consider [donating it](#).

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), nearly three-quarters of babies will eat formula at some point in their first six months of life.

Datasembly projects that the formula shortage will continue.

The Infant Nutrition Council of America is encouraging parents to keep a 10-day supply on hand, if possible.

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HEADLINE	05/10 WA child care programs understaffed
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/80-washington-child-care-programs-are-understaffed/JYHA75FGMBARXGT57TEVA2L5XE/
GIST	<p>Parents across Puget Sound say it’s a real struggle to find reliable child care these days. According to ChildCareAware, which represents 5,000 Washington providers, 80% of programs in the state report they’re understaffed right now.</p> <p>Oak Harbor moms Jessica Vanvelkinburgh and Amber Bovee say they’ve experienced long waitlists and not enough options.</p> <p>“The day care that my children are in has anywhere between 70 and 90 children on a waitlist at any given time,” said Vanvelkinburg.</p> <p>“Waiting lists right now are horrendously long,” said Bovee. “A lot of parents don’t have a choice. It’s either hope for the best and hope your child is safe, or don’t go to work.”</p> <p>Ryan Pricco of ChildCareAware says some of these small businesses offer a poverty wage with no benefits. Therefore, it’s hard to recruit people into the industry.</p>

	<p>“Child care educators are not paid anywhere near the amount of money they deserve,” said Pricco.</p> <p>Day care providers KIRO 7 spoke to say raising pay is a Catch-22.</p> <p>“Parents are tapped out,” said Pricco.</p> <p>A 2020 ChildCareAware study showed a Washington-state family with kids under 6 years old spends nearly 20% of the median household income on child care alone. Pricco thinks the solution is state funding for early care and education, like what already exists with K-12.</p> <p>“We are always going to have these problems. We’re never going to be able to meet demand for child care,” said Pricco. “Until we get serious about investing in it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Bellevue residents face soaring rent hikes
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/im-going-be-homeless-bellevue-residents-face-soaring-rent-hikes/ZA7W3CHG6NCUXFYTG3D7UZGUE/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — Inflation keeps hitting families harder as prices continue to soar. Gas prices reached a new record overnight, hitting an average of \$4.87 in Washington and topping \$5 a gallon in King County, according to AAA.</p> <p>But the hike that’s hitting people the hardest is rent increases. The King County Regional Homeless Authority says it places about 6,000 people and families into housing every year. However, that’s still not keeping up with how many people are becoming homeless.</p> <p>Zetta Alexander is a grandmother and longtime Bellevue resident. She says after months of stress and worrying caused by a major rent hike, she narrowly avoided being pushed into homelessness.</p> <p>“I’m 67 years old now and actually raising two grandchildren,” Alexander said. “I love Bellevue, that’s why I’m still here, but I want to have a voice for people to know what’s going on,” she said.</p> <p>In January, she found out the rent for her two-bedroom apartment would be increasing by \$700 — going from \$2,500 per month to \$3,200 per month, a hike of 28%.</p> <p>“My first thought was, oh my goodness, I’m going to be displaced,” Alexander said. “I felt like, OK, I’ve never been homeless in my life. I’m going to be homeless. That’s how I felt, that was the scary part,” she said.</p> <p>Alexander says she lives on a fixed income and already spends about half of it on rent.</p> <p>She searched for months trying to find something she could afford, while everything else was getting more expensive.</p> <p>“I go to the grocery store and what I probably could’ve gotten for \$40, it’s probably \$65 or \$70,” Alexander said.</p> <p>Meanwhile, she said she knows of families worse off, including one recently priced out of their home and into emergency shelter at Mary’s Place in Bellevue.</p> <p>“No one is knowing this unless we tell it,” Alexander said.</p> <p>As tech companies like Amazon, Facebook, Google and T-Mobile all expand their footprint in Bellevue, Alexander says it is changing the landscape.</p>

“That’s wonderful, but it’s affecting this community — the people who’ve been here, the people who’ve supported this community for years. Now they’re pushing the community out. That’s just the bottom line,” Alexander said.

In fact, the [May 2022 report from ApartmentList](#) shows Bellevue’s rent prices went up 21.5% over the last year, compared to 16% in Seattle and 8% in Tacoma.

“There should be more affordable housing, and I think there should be finally rent control, because it is out of control,” Alexander said.

Just last week, Alexander did find a place she can afford for about \$2,400 a month.

“I was two steps from being homeless last week, and here I am now thankful I’ve found a place,” she said. Alexander says she does have kids in the area who she could stay with, but didn’t want to burden her children.

“Because you are Mom — and you don’t want to say, ‘oh, I’m scared,’ but it was scary, no doubt,” she said.

The traditional form of rent control was banned in Washington state back in the 1980s. Bellevue Mayor Lynne Robinson says the city is working to add affordable housing as quickly as possible. The city expects to add about 700 units in the next couple of years.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Tackling officer shortages different tactics
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/local-law-enforcement-tackle-officer-shortages-with-different-tactics
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Two King County police agencies are both combating officer shortages, but are taking different approaches to recruit new people. The verdict is out on which agency is taking the better approach.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department is approaching 400 separations since the beginning of 2020. That represents 36% of the officers at the beginning of that time period.</p> <p>However, the King County Sheriff’s Office is suffering a staffing crisis of its own.</p> <p>"It’s a challenge" newly-appointed sheriff Patti Cole-Tindall told members of a King County Council committee on Tuesday.</p> <p>She revealed a significant number officers where either fired, retired or resigned after refusing to follow the vaccine mandate issued by King County Executive Dow Constantine.</p> <p>A report found 27 commissioned deputies were fired, then another 20 resigned or retired because of the mandate. Combined, the departures represent 6% of the current deputy staffing.</p> <p>"We had a large number of vacancies before this played in and this just added on top" said Cole-Tindall.</p> <p>Currently, the department has 113 vacancies for commissioned officers. That’s 13% of the 895 commissioned officers that department was budgeted for in 2022.</p> <p>Sheriff is offering cash bonuses for lateral hires and new recruits to compete with 11 nearby police agencies doing the same. The lone exception is Seattle, which is offering no hiring or retention bonus.</p> <p>Cole-Tindall said four people accepted the department \$15,000 lateral hiring bonus while 16 accepted a \$7,500 bonus to sign on as a new recruit this year.</p>

"The defund, disarm and disparage movement against the police has created an environment where we have this huge number of vacancies," said King County council member Reagan Dunn, who wants all separated unvaccinated deputies and professional staff to be reinstated because of the staffing crisis.

"If our numbers continue to increase in terms of commissioned vacancies, we are at risk of not being able to provide basic public safety," said Cole-Tindall.

Meanwhile, the union representing Seattle police officers claims the SPD has lost 59 officers from the beginning of the year through the beginning of May. As of April 25, the department said it's seen 43 officers leave and has hired 13.

"You're gaining one person and losing 15 a month," said Seattle Police Officer's Guild President Mike Solan. "If you're operating a business, that's operating in the red; that's not good."

There may be harmony among several members of the Seattle City Council and Mayor Bruce Harrell over lifting a budget proviso to allow unspent salary at SPD to go to some form of hiring incentives.

The Public Safety Committee approved a bill on Tuesday freeing \$1.5 million dollars dedicate to salaries and allocated it for new recruiter position and payment of moving expenses for newly hired officers.

A non-binding resolution demonstrating the Council's intent to use unspent salaries for recruitment and retention also passed a committee vote.

SPD has been budgeted to hire 125 officers in 2022, but last week, Police Chief Adrian Diaz said the projection has been lowered to 98, resulting between \$4.1 and \$4.5 million in salary savings.

The lone dissenting member for both votes was Budget Committee Chairperson Teresa Mosqueda who argued the city is facing a budget shortfall next year and needs to start saving money now in preparation.

"I don't think this is the best use of funds when the city is currently facing ongoing budget structural issue," said Mosqueda.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Water use jumps in drought-ravaged Calif.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/la-plans-to-impose-twice-weekly-landscape-watering-limit/
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California's water use jumped dramatically in March, state officials said Tuesday, as one of the driest stretches on record prompted a wave of homeowners to start watering their lawns earlier than usual in defiance of Gov. Gavin Newsom's pleas for conservation amid a severe drought.</p> <p>Newsom last summer asked residents to voluntarily cut water use by 15% compared to 2020 as climate change intensified a drought that threatened to drain the state's reservoirs to dangerously low levels. Water conservation increased gradually through December, aided by some intense fall and early winter storms that reduced water demand.</p> <p>But the first three months of 2022 have been the driest on record. Californians averaged 77 gallons (291.48 liters) per person per day in March, an 18.9% increase from March 2020. It's the most water Californians have used in March since the middle of the previous drought in 2015. Statewide, water consumption is up just 3.7% since July compared to 2020, woefully short of Newsom's 15% goal</p> <p>Newsom responded on Tuesday by pledging to spend \$100 million on a statewide advertising campaign to encourage water conservation. The campaign will include traditional radio and television spots while also paying people with large followings on social media to urge others to save water. He also promised to spend an \$211 million to conserve more water in state government buildings by replacing plumbing fixtures and irrigation controls.</p>

“Conservation actions are most impactful when they account for the diversity of conditions and supply needs around the state,” Newsom’s office said in a statement. “We are hopeful these actions will significantly contribute to the state’s overall water reduction goals as outdoor watering is one of the biggest single users of water.”

In Los Angeles — the second most populous city in the U.S. — Mayor Eric Garcetti said residents and businesses would have to reduce outdoor landscape watering from three days per week to two. Irrigation makes up 35% of the city’s water use.

Urban water use accounts for a relatively small percentage of California’s overall water use when compared to agriculture. But the state’s farmers have been suffering, too, as state and federal officials have reduced water allocations to zero in some places.

Demand for non-agriculture water is typically low in March, which comes near the end of the state’s rainy season. It can sometimes rain so much in March that it makes up for the rest of the year, a phenomenon officials have dubbed the “March miracle.”

But California got just 1 inch (2.54 centimeters) of precipitation in March while the temperatures were 3 degrees warmer than usual, further increasing water demand.

A series of April storms have improved things slightly since March. Still, most of the state’s reservoirs are well below their historic averages. The reservoirs depend on melted snow from the Sierra Nevada to replenish them for the dry summer months. But the statewide snowpack was at just 27% of its historic average as of April 1.

“This is what we have. This is what we’re going to get. We can’t expect anything significant past this date,” said Jeanine Jones, manager for interstate resources with the California Department of Water Resources.

State officials said 20% of the wells they monitor are reporting all-time low water levels, while nearly half of them have less than 10% of their historic averages. In some cases, the state is helping to haul water to small communities that don’t have access to it. State officials said they were assisting 687 households through a small community drought relief program.

Some larger communities were also in danger. Lindsay, a city of about 13,000 people in California’s Central Valley, was projected to run out of water on July 1. Federal officials approved an additional allocation for the city, which they now say will have enough water to last through February — provided they continue to conserve.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Russia seizes much of Ukraine’s east
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/world/europe/ukraine-russia-donbas.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link ba ck to briefing
GIST	<p>POKROVSK, Ukraine — Russia’s nearly three-month-old invasion of neighboring Ukraine has been punctuated by flawed planning, poor intelligence, barbarity and wanton destruction. But obscured in the daily fighting is the geographic reality that Russia has made gains on the ground.</p> <p>The Russian Defense Ministry said Tuesday that its forces in eastern Ukraine had advanced to the border between Donetsk and Luhansk, the two Russian-speaking provinces where Moscow-backed separatists have been fighting Ukraine’s army for eight years.</p> <p>The ministry’s assertion, if confirmed, strengthens the prospect that Russia could soon gain complete control over the region, known as the Donbas, compared with just a third of it before the Feb. 24 invasion.</p>

That is a far cry from what appeared to be the grand ambitions of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia when he launched the invasion: quick and easy seizure of vast swaths of Ukraine, including the capital, Kyiv, the overthrow of a hostile government and a replacement with unquestioned fealty that would ensure Ukraine's subservience.

Nonetheless, the Donbas seizure, combined with the Russian invasion's early success in seizing parts of southern Ukraine adjoining the Crimean peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014, gives the Kremlin enormous leverage in any future negotiation to halt the conflict.

And the Russians enjoy the added advantage of naval dominance in the Black Sea, the only maritime route for Ukrainian trade, which they have paralyzed with an embargo that could eventually starve Ukraine economically and is already contributing to a global grain shortage.

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington on Tuesday, Avril D. Haines, the director of national intelligence, warned of a "prolonged conflict" in Ukraine as Russia seeks expansive territorial gains beyond the Donbas region, including the creation of a land bridge across Ukraine's Black Sea coast.

But Ms. Haines cautioned that Mr. Putin would struggle to achieve those gains without a large-scale mobilization or draft, which he appears reluctant to order for now. As Mr. Putin's territorial ambitions conflict with the limited capabilities of his military, Ms. Haines said that the war could enter "a more unpredictable and potentially escalatory trajectory" over the next few months, increasing the likelihood of Mr. Putin issuing direct threats to use nuclear weapons.

For the last several weeks, Ukrainian and Russian troops have been engaged in a grueling attrition, often fighting fiercely over small areas, as one village falls into Russian hands on one day only to be retaken by the Ukrainians a few days later.

The Ukrainians are increasingly dependent on an infusion of Western military and humanitarian aid, much of it from the United States, where the House voted Tuesday evening to approve a nearly \$40 billion emergency package.

"The Russians aren't winning, and the Ukrainians aren't winning, and we're at a bit of a stalemate here," said Lt. Gen. Scott D. Berrier, the director of the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, who testified alongside Ms. Haines.

Still, Russia has all but achieved one of its primary objectives: seizing a land bridge connecting Russian territory to the Crimean peninsula.

When Mr. Putin ordered the invasion, some of his military's most skilled fighters poured out of Crimea and southern Russia, quickly seizing a ribbon of Ukrainian territory along the Sea of Azov. The last stronghold of Ukrainian resistance in this area, at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, has been whittled to a few hundred hungry troops now confined mostly to bunkers.

But efforts by Russian forces to expand and fortify the land bridge have been complicated by Ukrainian forces deployed along an east-west front that undulates through sprawling fields of wheat and occasionally engulfs villages and towns.

Though Russian artillery and rockets have wreaked havoc in residential areas, flattening houses and terrorizing locals, the Russian military has not committed enough forces to move the line significantly or threaten the major industrial hub of Zaporizhzhia, the largest city near the frontline, Col. Oleg Goncharuk, the commander of the 128th Separate Mountain Assault Brigade, said in an interview last month.

"They will try to block our forces from moving forward and they are trying to solidify their positions," said Colonel Goncharuk, whose forces are arrayed along the southeast front. "But we don't know their orders or what their ambitions are."

It is in the eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk where fighting is the fiercest.

At the main hospital in Kramatorsk, a city in Donetsk, ambulances stream in day and night, carrying soldiers wounded at the front, who describe being pinned down by near constant shelling.

About 80 percent of the patients are wounded by explosives such as mines and artillery shells, said Capt. Eduard Antonovskyy, the deputy commander of the medical unit at the hospital. Because of this, he said, very few patients have serious injuries. Either you're far enough from an explosion to survive or you aren't, he said.

"We either get moderate injuries or deaths," Captain Antonovskyy said.

Russian forces now control about 80 percent of Donbas, according to Ukrainian officials, and have concentrated their efforts on a pocket of Ukrainian-held territory with Kramatorsk at its center.

All around the city, the booms of distant fighting can be heard at all hours and heavy smoke hangs like a morning fog. Almost daily, Russian forces launch rocket attacks and airstrikes on the city itself, but the most punishing violence is reserved for those places in range of Russian artillery.

About 62 miles northeast of Kramatorsk is Severodonetsk, where Russian artillery, parked about five or six miles outside the city, rarely relents, making it difficult for the 15,000 or so residents who remain to venture above ground.

Oleg Grigorov, the police chief in the Luhansk region, compared the violence to the Battle of Stalingrad in World War II, when Soviet forces turned the tide against the Nazis, but only after having suffered tremendous losses.

"It never ends. At all," Mr. Grigorov said. "Whole neighborhoods are destroyed. For days, for weeks, they have been shelling. They are intentionally annihilating our infrastructure and the civilian population."

Mr. Grigorov said about 200 of his officers remained in the city, which has lost electricity and water. Their primary task is delivering food to people sheltering in their basements and burying the dead.

Russia's Black Sea blockade of Ukraine has not diminished the Kremlin's desire to gain control of Odesa, the most important Ukrainian port, which has been subjected to several aerial attacks. In the latest, Russian forces fired seven missiles, striking a shopping mall and a consumer goods warehouse and killing at least one person and wounding several more, Ukrainian officials said.

The strike came only hours after the European Council president, Charles Michel, had visited Odesa, where he was forced to take cover in a bomb shelter because of another attack.

Mr. Michel, who met with Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal of Ukraine, criticized Russia for strangling Ukrainian grain exports that feed people around the world.

"I saw silos full of grain, wheat and corn ready for export," Mr. Michel said in a statement. "This badly needed food is stranded because of the Russian war and blockade of Black Sea ports, causing dramatic consequences for vulnerable countries."

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine urged the international community to pressure Russia to lift the blockade.

"For the first time in decades there is no usual movement of the merchant fleet, no usual port functioning in Odesa," he said in an overnight address. "Probably, this has never happened in Odesa since World War II."

	<p>Ukraine's economy is expected to shrink 30 percent this year, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development said on Tuesday, worsening its forecast from just two months ago, when it predicted a 20 percent shrinkage.</p> <p>The war has "put Ukraine's economy under enormous stress, with the heavy devastation of infrastructure and production capacities," the bank said in an economic update.</p> <p>It estimated that 30 percent to 50 percent of Ukrainian businesses have shut down, 10 percent of the population has fled the country and a further 15 percent is displaced internally.</p> <p>The bank also forecast that Russia's economy would shrink by 10 percent this year and stagnate next year, with a bleak outlook unless a peace agreement leads to the relaxing of Western sanctions.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 How much of Ukraine does Russia hold?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/world/russian-forces-occupation-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Russia invaded Ukraine with the intention of toppling the government, seizing Kyiv, the capital, and bringing the nation firmly into the Kremlin's sphere of influence.</p> <p>While Moscow failed in those sweeping objectives, Russian forces have seized a wide swath of southern Ukraine and redeployed soldiers, vehicles and heavy weapons with the aim of pushing deeper into eastern Ukraine, expanding the territory it has controlled through proxy forces since 2014.</p> <p>The Ukrainian and Russian armies are now in a grueling war of attrition, often fighting fiercely over small areas. But if Russia can hold the territory it occupies on land and maintain its dominion at sea, that could give it the capacity to strangle the Ukrainian economy and provide either leverage in any negotiated settlement or a staging ground for broader assaults across the country.</p> <p>Here is a look at where things stand.</p> <p>The South</p> <p>Russia made its swiftest and largest gains in the first weeks of the war in the south, sweeping north out of Crimea — which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014 — and taking over the city of Kherson and much of the surrounding region. Spread out over some 11,000 square miles, the region is a little smaller than Maryland and Delaware combined.</p> <p>The Kherson region had a prewar population of more than one million people, although Ukrainian officials say more than half of them have fled. Located on the west bank of the Dnieper river, it is home to a major port connected to the Black Sea. Moscow has steadily taken steps to tear away at its Ukrainian identity by introducing Russian currency, and by appointing and tightly controlling proxy local leaders.</p> <p>But Russian control of the territory is not complete. The Ukrainians have been staging sporadic counterattacks, trying to claw back towns and villages.</p> <p>The Southeast</p> <p>After taking Kherson, Russian forces moved to seize territory to the east in the southeastern province of Zaporizka, home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant. The Russians are now estimated to control about 70 percent of the province.</p> <p>While the Ukrainian government remains in control of the city of Zaporizhzhia, Russian forces control Berdiansk, a critical port along the Sea of Azov; Melitopol, the region's second largest city; and Enerhodar and its nuclear plant.</p> <p>The province had 1.6 million people before the war; it is hard to estimate how many have stayed behind. The mayor of Melitopol said on Monday that about 60 percent of the city's residents had fled.</p>

Mariupol

On the edge of the eastern Ukrainian region of Donetsk, this once thriving port city is now destroyed. Ukrainian officials estimate that 20,000 civilians have been killed in the monthslong Russian siege, and three-fourths of the population have fled. The United Nations says that [thousands of civilians](#) have been killed there. What is left of the city is largely under Russian control. The last Ukrainian soldiers are trapped in a sprawling steel mill near the port.

Claiming the city has allowed Russia to complete a coveted link by land from Crimea to the eastern region of Donetsk, which is controlled by their proxy forces, and to Russia itself.

The Black Sea

While Russia failed in its advance on the Black Sea port city of Odesa, the Russian Navy controls the Black Sea itself and has effectively blockaded Ukraine, which the United Nations and other international observers have said is fueling a global food crisis.

The Ukrainians and Russians have been engaged in a fierce battle over a spit of land in the Black Sea called Snake Island, about 80 miles off the coast from Odesa. Before the war, Ukrainian control of the island was a key to extending Ukraine's claims on the sea.

While Russia has never been able to establish control in the skies over Ukraine, it has near-total superiority at sea.

The East

The Kremlin has said it wants to "liberate" the whole Donbas region, which combines two big eastern enclaves, Luhansk and Donetsk. The two provinces border Russia and run from outside Mariupol in the south to the northern border near Kharkiv.

Russian forces had a head start in the east, since Russian proxy forces seized more than a third of the area in 2014. They have since expanded their control to cover an estimated 80 to 90 percent, Ukrainian officials said. On Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said its forces had [reached the border between the provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk](#).

Much of this territory has been bombarded into ruins. Only 50,000 civilians are estimated to still be living in the Ukrainian-controlled part of Luhansk. Still, the Ukrainians have concentrated a large but unspecified amount of their own forces in the region to stop the Russian advance.

The Northeast

In the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance, poor planning, bad logistics and rigid tactics, Russia failed to seize major population centers in the northeast. It was driven out of Chernihiv and Sumy, and never managed to control Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city.

But Russia still holds territory near the border that it did not control before the war, around the region of Kharkiv. It also claims control over Izium, although sustained fighting continues around the city.

This part of the country is being fiercely contested, with the Ukrainians launching a major offensive around Kharkiv, which is only about 20 miles from the Russian border. The Ukrainians have since [pushed Russian forces back](#) toward the northeast border and away from the city.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Americans open record number credit cards
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/americans-open-a-record-number-of-credit-cards-as-inflation-boosts-costs/
GIST	<i>Bloomberg</i> - Americans are putting more on their credit cards and taking out fewer mortgages, as they need to borrow more to cover the increasing cost of everyday essentials and rates rise.

A record 537 million credit card accounts were opened in the first quarter, a jump of 31 million over the past year, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York's quarterly report on household debt and credit. Meantime, mortgage originations totaled \$859 billion in the first three months of 2022, the lowest in nearly two years.

While mortgages are still by far the biggest component of household debt at 71%, the data show how consumers are relying more on credit cards as decades-high inflation boosts the cost of everything from food and gas to shelter. And now that the Fed is tightening policy and mortgage rates are the highest since 2009, Americans are refinancing them much less, as well as auto debt.

The data reflect a stark contrast from 2021, when Americans capitalized on some of the lowest interest rates ever to refinance debt at historic levels. Now that the Fed has hiked rates by the most since 2000 and indicated it will keep doing so in the coming months, debt service costs are rising as well.

Economists have warned that higher interest payments could tip certain kinds of debt, especially student-loan borrowers, into delinquency from historically low levels. Interest payments starting to tick up across nearly all debt types, including credit cards mortgages, auto loans, and home equity lines of credit, according to the New York Fed. There was also a small increase in the number of foreclosures in the first quarter.

A separate report last week showed US consumer borrowing soared in March by the most on record as credit-card balances ballooned and non-revolving credit jumped, underscoring the combined impact of solid spending and rising prices. That's a good sign in that spending is the largest contributor to the economy, but could be worrisome if Americans can't keep up on payments.

Mortgage originations boomed in the pandemic when rates were low, but have been declining in recent weeks as rates rise. The 30-year mortgage rate as measured by Freddie Mac now stands at 5.27%, the highest since 2009.

"Unlike the 2003-2006 housing boom, mortgage debt has been rising much more slowly than home values," Andrew Haughwout, director in the New York Fed's research and statistics group, in a separate blog post.

Haughwout also noted that loans nowadays are going to borrowers with higher credit scores, reflecting continuing high lending standards coming out of the 2008 financial crisis. More than two thirds of newly originated mortgage debt last quarter was for borrowers with credit scores over 760, while just 2% went to subprime borrowers. That compares to an average of 12% in the years leading up to the Great Recession.

Autos were the third-highest category of debt after mortgages and student loans, thanks to an increase in prices that's prompted buyers to borrow more. That may create a longer-term financial burden for households stuck with large loan payments even as prices of used vehicles start coming down from their peaks.

As used car prices drop, new borrowers in particular are at risk in that they may owe more on their cars than the vehicles are worth.

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HEADLINE	05/10 US intel misjudged Afghanistan, Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation-politics/us-intel-questioned-for-misjudging-afghanistan-ukraine/
GIST	WASHINGTON (AP) — Top U.S. intelligence officials were questioned Tuesday about why they misjudged the durability of governments in both Afghanistan and Ukraine, and whether they need to reform how intelligence agencies assess a foreign military's will to fight.

U.S. intelligence believed the U.S.-backed Kabul government would hold out for months against the Taliban and thought Russian forces would overrun Ukraine in a few weeks. Both assessments were wrong. The U.S. and Western allies are now rushing to aid Ukraine's resistance against Russia in what has turned into a grinding, violent stalemate.

"What we missed was the will to fight of the Ukrainians...and we also missed that in Afghanistan," said Sen. Angus King, an independent from Maine, at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He added, "I realize will to fight is a lot harder to assess than number of tanks or volume of ammunition or something. But I hope the intelligence community is doing some soul-searching about how to better get a handle on that question."

President Joe Biden's administration disclosed in advance Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions to invade Ukraine, a public campaign that it says built support for crushing sanctions on the Russian economy and military support from NATO members. Top U.S. officials have gone to Kyiv to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and pledged more military and intelligence support.

Avril Haines, the U.S. director of national intelligence, said that "will to fight" and "capacity to fight" in tandem were difficult to predict. The National Intelligence Council, a group of advisers that reviews the agencies as a whole, is studying the issue, she said.

"The two of them are issues that are, as you indicated, quite challenging to provide effective analysis on," Haines told King. "And we're looking at different methodologies for doing so."

The U.S. might have done more before the invasion to assist Zelenskyy had lawmakers believed Kyiv had more of a chance, King said. And after predictions that the Taliban would be held back as long as a year after the American withdrawal, the coalition-backed government "lasted minus-two weeks," King noted, a reference to the Taliban overrunning Kabul before the withdrawal formally ended.

The U.S. was forced to negotiate with the Taliban to evacuate of thousands of American citizens and Afghan allies fighting huge crowds to secure space on evacuation flights. An attack at the Kabul airport killed 13 U.S. troops and at least 170 Afghan civilians.

King raised his voice to cut off Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, after Berrier said he believed the intelligence agencies had done "a great job."

"General, how can you possibly say that when we were told explicitly, Kyiv would fall in three days and Ukraine would fall in two weeks?" he said. "You're telling me that was accurate intelligence?"

U.S. intelligence believed before the war Russia's forces were so much larger and more powerful than Ukraine's that "it wasn't going to go very well for a variety of factors," Berrier said.

He testified Tuesday that "there was never an intelligence community assessment that said the Ukrainians lacked the will to fight." That appears to contradict his statement from Senate testimony in March, when Berrier said he "questioned their will to fight. That was a bad assessment on my part because they have fought bravely and honorably and are doing the right thing."

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HEADLINE	05/10 Sri Lanka orders troops shoot violent mobs
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-sri-lanka-colombo-mahinda-rajapaksa-9a04232a6de8de575392ffa47ad9273d
GIST	COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's defense ministry ordered security forces on Tuesday to shoot anyone causing injury to people or property to contain widespread arson and mob violence targeting government supporters.

The order came after violent clashes a day earlier left eight people dead and prompted the resignation of the prime minister, who is blamed along with his brother, the president, for [leading the country into its worst economic crisis](#).

The clashes started after mobs supporting the government beat peaceful protesters who had camped out near the prime minister's residence and president's office demanding their resignations, as police watched and did little to stop them. Across the country, angry citizens responded by attacking government supporters and ruling party politicians.

Eight people including a ruling party lawmaker and two police were killed and 219 were injured in the violence, said Kamal Gunaratne, secretary to the Ministry of Defense. He said 104 buildings and 60 vehicles were burned.

Defying a 36-hour nationwide curfew, several hundred protesters continued to chant slogans against the government on Tuesday. Some people attacked the homes of government supporters, but the violence that raged Monday had largely abated.

For months, people have been forced to stand in long lines to buy essentials because a foreign exchange crisis has caused imports of everything from milk to fuel to plunge, spawning dire food shortages and rolling power cuts. Doctors have warned of crippling shortages of life-saving drugs in hospitals, and the government has suspended payments on \$7 billion in foreign debt due this year alone.

"The defense ministry has ordered the tri-forces to shoot at persons involved in theft of public property or causing damage to individuals," the ministry said in a text message.

"There is an emergency and a curfew in force but we see sections of the youth breaking into homes committing arson, assault, killings and theft," Gunaratne said in a statement.

Despite the curfew, hundreds of protesters swarmed the entrance to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office in the capital, Colombo, for the 32nd day Tuesday to demand that he follow in his brother's footsteps and quit.

One of the protesters, software engineer Chamath Bogahawatta, said the government "did something very despicable by bringing in people to provoke us."

"There will be more people joining us. How long are they going to rule a country under curfew?" he said.

Chandrika Kumaratunga, who was Sri Lanka's president from 1994 to 2005, warned against violence, tweeting that "saboteurs may be used to incite violence in order to pave the way for military rule."

President Rajapaksa is a former military officer who has loyalists within the forces.

With Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's resignation, the Cabinet was also dissolved, creating an administrative vacuum. Even though the president has the most power under the constitution, a prime minister and Cabinet are needed to manage the government.

The prime minister is also the next in line if the presidency falls vacant.

Religious leaders and the lawyers' Bar Association of Sri Lanka were in talks with political leaders on the formation of a new Cabinet.

Pressure on President Rajapaksa to step down has increased following his brother's resignation, analysts say, and comes as the economy has dramatically fallen apart.

The president initially said the crisis wasn't created by him, laying the blame on global factors such as the pandemic's impact on the tourism industry and higher global oil prices caused by the Russia-Ukraine

	<p>conflict. But unable to escape the public anger, both he and his brother have since admitted to mistakes that exacerbated the crisis, and conceded they should have sought an International Monetary Fund bailout sooner.</p> <p>In March, after citizens had endured critical shortages of fuel, cooking gas and medicine for months, the president finally reached out to the IMF. Talks to set up a rescue plan are being held, with progress dependent on negotiations on debt restructuring with creditors. But any long-term plan is expected to take at least six months to get underway.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Germany reopens embassy in Kyiv
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-europe-e808e402684fca1b8194677899ba1e35
GIST	<p>KYIV (AP) — German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Tuesday reopened her country’s embassy in Kyiv that was closed more than two months ago following the Russian invasion.</p> <p>Baerbock, the first German Cabinet member to visit Ukraine since the start of the war, also pledged that Berlin would provide further support to Kyiv, including when it comes to investigating and prosecuting war crimes.</p> <p>Speaking after visiting the towns of Bucha and Irpin, where Russian soldiers are alleged to have killed numerous civilians, Baerbock said there can “never again be impunity for the war crimes committed by Russia, the deportations, or for the murderers and rapists.”</p> <p>“That is why we will provide political, financial, and support through German staff, particularly at the International Criminal Court,” she said, adding that Germany will also pay for two additional Ukrainian prosecutors who will investigate sexual violence committed during the conflict.</p> <p>Baerbock expressed deep sorrow over the civilians killed during the war, saying that “the worst crimes imaginable” had been perpetrated in Bucha, on the outskirts of Kyiv, that was occupied by Russian forces for several weeks.</p> <p>Survivors have told how Russian soldiers targeted civilians seemingly at random there, leaving their bodies lying on the street after their withdrawal on March 31.</p> <p>Baerbock said she heard accounts from those who had lost loved ones during the occupation, including people killed in a supermarket while they were going shopping, and a woman and her two children shot dead while they were trying to flee.</p> <p>“We owe it to the victims that we don’t just commemorate them here, but that we hold the perpetrators to account,” Baerbock said during a brief visit to the town with Ukraine’s prosecutor general. “And we as the international community will do this. That’s the promise we can and must make here in Bucha.”</p> <p>“Nobody can take away the pain (of the survivors),” she added. “The pain of fathers and mothers, of aunts, uncles, friends, neighbors and colleagues. But we can ensure there is justice.”</p> <p>The head of the U.N. human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, Matilda Bogner, said Tuesday that she had received reports of more than 300 men, women and children being unlawfully killed in Bucha during the occupation.</p> <p>Across Ukraine, the global body has corroborated 3,381 civilian deaths since the beginning of the war.</p> <p>“The actual figures are higher and we are working to corroborate every single incident,” Bogner said.</p> <p>Baerbock’s trip comes days after Berlin and Kyiv set aside a diplomatic spat concerning Ukraine’s unwillingness to invite the German president because of his past close dealings with Russia.</p>

Relations between the two countries remain tense, however.

Germany has been criticized for dragging its feet over arms supplies to Ukraine and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba slammed Berlin police for removing his country's flag from protesters at a World War II memorial event in the German capital Sunday. Police said the ban on Ukrainian and Russian flags was intended to prevent clashes between supporters of both countries and only applied to limited parts of the city.

Baerbock, who met with Kuleba and later with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, stressed that Germany now supports the delivery of heavy weapons to Ukraine, including Gepard self-propelled anti-aircraft guns and powerful howitzers. Some of the German-made howitzers will be provided by the Netherlands, whose foreign minister was also in Kyiv on Tuesday, but Ukrainian soldiers will be trained to use them in Germany.

Germany, which has long relied on energy supplies, plans to reduce this dependence "to zero, forever," said Baerbock. The German government aims to wean itself off Russian oil and coal this year and end imports of natural gas from Russia by 2024 at the latest.

Baerbock said Germany remains committed to the sanctions that have already been agreed against Russia, adding that they could only be lifted "when Ukraine is free and is able to say of its own accord: we can live in peace again."

She also appeared to push back against French President Emmanuel Macron's suggestion Monday that it might take decades for Ukraine to become a member of the European Union, and that the country could join a new, looser political grouping in the meantime.

"There can be no shortcuts to full membership of the EU," Baerbock said. "But I emphasize full membership here."

"Now is not the moment for legal pedantry," she added. "Now is the moment to take a clear position."

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HEADLINE	05/10 Russia pummels Odessa; target supplies
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-nato-moscow-c8e00f7bbc4f24aa40d70a4ac2d97adb
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Russia pummeled the vital port of Odesa, Ukrainian officials said Tuesday, in an apparent effort to disrupt supply lines and Western weapons shipments as Ukraine's foreign minister appeared to suggest the country could expand its war aims.</p> <p>With the war now in its 11th week and Kyiv bogging down Russian forces and even staging a counteroffensive, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba seemed to indicate that the country could go beyond merely pushing Russia back to areas it or its allies held on the day of the Feb. 24 invasion.</p> <p>The idea reflected Ukraine's ability to stymie a larger, better-armed Russian military, which has surprised many who had anticipated a much quicker end to the conflict.</p> <p>One of the most dramatic examples of Ukraine's ability to prevent easy victories is in Mariupol, where Ukrainian fighters remained holed up at a steel plant, denying Russia's full control of the city. The regiment defending the plant said Russian warplanes continued bombarding it, striking 34 times in 24 hours.</p> <p>In recent days, the United Nations and the Red Cross organized a rescue of what some officials said were the last civilians trapped at the plant. But two officials said Tuesday that about 100 were believed to still be in the complex's underground tunnels. Donetsk regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said those who remain are people "that the Russians have not selected" for evacuation.</p>

Kyrylenko and Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to Mariupol's mayor, did not say how they knew civilians were still in the complex — a warren of tunnels and bunkers spread over 11 square kilometers (4 square miles). Others said their statements were impossible to confirm.

Fighters with the Azov regiment released photos of their wounded comrades inside the plant, including some with amputated limbs. They said the wounded were living in unsanitary conditions “with open wounds bandaged with non-sterile remnants of bandages, without the necessary medication and even food.”

In its statement on Telegram, the regiment appealed to the U.N and Red Cross to evacuate the wounded servicemen to Ukrainian-controlled territories.

In another example of the grisly toll of the war, Ukrainian officials said they found the bodies of 44 civilians in the rubble of a building destroyed weeks ago in the northeastern city of Izyum.

New U.N. figures, meanwhile, said that 14 million Ukrainians were forced from their homes by the end of April, including more than 5.9 million who have left the country.

In Washington, a top U.S. intelligence official testified Tuesday that eight to 10 Russian generals have been killed in the war. Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, who leads the Defense Intelligence Agency, told a Senate committee that because Russia lacks a noncommissioned officer corps, its generals have to go into combat zones and end up in dangerous positions.

Ukraine said Tuesday that Russian forces fired seven missiles at Odesa a day earlier, hitting a shopping center and a warehouse in the country's largest port. One person was killed and five wounded, the military said.

Images showed a burning building and debris — including a tennis shoe — in a heap of destruction in the city on the Black Sea. Mayor Gennady Trukhanov later visited the warehouse and said it “had nothing in common with military infrastructure or military objects.”

Ukraine alleged at least some of the munitions used dated to the Soviet era, making them unreliable in targeting. Ukrainian, British and U.S. officials say Russia is rapidly using up its stock of precision weapons, raising the risk of more imprecise rockets being used as the conflict grinds on.

Since President Vladimir Putin's forces failed to take Kyiv early in the war, his focus has shifted to the eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas — but one general has suggested Moscow's aims also include cutting Ukraine's maritime access to both the Black and Azov seas.

That would also give it a swath of territory linking Russia to both the Crimean Peninsula, which it seized in 2014, and Transnistria, a pro-Moscow region of Moldova.

Even if Russia falls short of severing Ukraine from the coast — and it appears to lack the forces to do so — the continuing missile strikes on Odesa reflect the city's strategic importance. The Russian military has repeatedly targeted its airport and claimed it destroyed several batches of Western weapons.

Odesa is also a major gateway for grain shipments, and its blockade by Russia already threatens global food supplies. Beyond that, the city is a cultural jewel, dear to Ukrainians and Russians alike, and targeting it carries symbolic significance.

Russian forces have made slow advances in the Donbas, but there have been multiple setbacks. Military analysts suggest that hitting Odesa might serve to stoke concern about southwestern Ukraine, thus forcing Kyiv to put more forces there. That would pull them away from the eastern front as Ukraine's military stages counteroffensives near the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Kharkiv and the surrounding area has been under sustained Russian attack since the early in the war. In recent weeks, grisly pictures testified to the horrors of those battles, with charred and mangled bodies strewn in one street.

Russian aircraft twice launched unguided missiles Tuesday at the Sumy area northeast of Kharkiv, according to the Ukrainian border guard service. The region's governor said the missiles hit several residential buildings, but no one was killed. The Chernihiv region, along the Ukrainian border with Belarus, was hit by mortars fired from Russian territory. There was no word on casualties.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Tuesday that the military was gradually pushing Russian troops away from Kharkiv. The Ukrainian military's general staff said its forces drove the Russians out of four villages to the northeast of Kharkiv as it tries to push them back toward the Russian border.

Kuleba, the Ukrainian foreign minister, meanwhile, appeared to voice increasing confidence — and expanded goals — amid Russia's stalled offensive. He told the Financial Times that Ukraine initially believed victory would be the withdrawal of Russian troops to positions they occupied before the Feb. 24 invasion.

"Now if we are strong enough on the military front, and we win the battle for Donbas, which will be crucial for the following dynamics of the war, of course the victory for us in this war will be the liberation of the rest of our territories."

The comments seemed to reflect political ambitions more than battlefield realities: Many analysts acknowledge that although Russia isn't capable of making quick gains, the Ukrainian military isn't strong enough to drive the Russians back.

Zelenskyy used his nightly address to pay tribute to Leonid Kravchuk, the first president of an independent Ukraine, who died Tuesday at 88. Zelenskyy said Kravchuk showed courage and knew how to get the country to listen to him.

That was particularly important in "crisis moments, when the future of the whole country may depend on the courage of one man," said Zelenskyy, whose own communication skills and decision to remain in Kyiv when it came under Russian attack have helped make him a strong wartime leader.

In the U.S., President Joe Biden signed a bipartisan measure Monday to reboot the World War II-era "lend-lease" program, which helped defeat Nazi Germany, to bolster Kyiv and its allies. On Tuesday, the U.S. House approved a new \$40 billion Ukraine aid package for defense and humanitarian programs in Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Ukraine small gains in east, hold Mariupol
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-kyiv-europe-d38703c060c6b066f2bd9012d147c6e1
GIST	<p>ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Kyiv's military has made small gains in the east, pushing Russian forces out of four villages near Kharkiv, as his country's foreign minister suggested Ukraine could go beyond just forcing Russia back to areas it held before the invasion began 11 weeks ago.</p> <p>Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba voiced what appeared to be increasing confidence — and expanded goals — amid Russia's stalled offensive in the east, telling the Financial Times that Ukraine initially believed victory would be the withdrawal of Russian troops to positions they occupied before the Feb. 24 invasion. But that's no longer the case.</p> <p>"Now if we are strong enough on the military front, and we win the battle for Donbas, which will be crucial for the following dynamics of the war, of course the victory for us in this war will be the liberation of the rest of our territories," Kuleba said.</p>

Russian forces have made advances in the Donbas and control more of it than they did before the war began. But Kuleba's statement — which seemed to reflect political ambitions more than battlefield realities — highlighted how Ukraine has stymied a larger, better-armed Russian military, surprising many who had anticipated a much quicker end to the conflict.

One of the most dramatic examples of Ukraine's ability to prevent easy victories is in Mariupol, where Ukrainian fighters holed up at a steel plant have denied Russia full control of the city. The regiment defending the plant said Russian warplanes continued bombarding it, striking 34 times in 24 hours.

In recent days, the United Nations and the Red Cross organized a rescue of what some officials said were the last civilians trapped at the plant. But two officials said Tuesday that about 100 were believed to still be in the complex's underground tunnels. Donetsk regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said those who remain are people "that the Russians have not selected" for evacuation.

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The photos could not be independently verified.

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With Russian forces struggling to gain ground in the Donbas, military analysts suggest that hitting Odesa might serve to stoke concern about southwestern Ukraine, thus forcing Kyiv to put more forces there. That would pull Ukrainian units away from the eastern front as Ukraine's military stages counteroffensives near the northeastern city of Kharkiv in an attempt to push the Russians back across the border there.

Meanwhile, Kharkiv and the surrounding area have been under sustained Russian attack since the early in the war. In recent weeks, grisly pictures testified to the horrors of those battles, with charred and mangled bodies strewn in one street.

The bodies of 44 civilians were found in the rubble of a five-story building that collapsed in March in Izyum, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Kharkiv, said Oleh Synehubov, the head of the regional administration, said Tuesday.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Universities struggle: student mental health
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/washington-universities-struggle-to-serve-all-their-students-mental-health-needs-heres-why/
GIST	<p>David, a sophomore pre-med student at the University of Washington, was used to juggling a busy schedule: He was a wrestler, swimmer, and runner in high school and works 20 hours a week on top of a full course load.</p> <p>Still, when he finally made it to campus this school year — attending labs in person for the first time after two years of online work — the stress was bubbling. Being on campus was challenging and exciting, but he felt higher expectations came with in-person learning.</p> <p>"I felt like I had to have my foot pressed all the way down on the pedal 100% of the time, or else everything's just gonna fall apart," said David, who asked that only his middle name be used out of concern that speaking about mental health struggles could disqualify him from future professional opportunities.</p> <p>"It just got to this point where I couldn't keep putting my foot down," he said.</p> <p>In January, David had a manic episode — a period of extremely elated, irritable or energized behavior — and his fraternity brothers took him to UW Medical Center on campus, where he was monitored overnight. He now sees a therapist weekly at the UW Counseling Center.</p> <p>David and many other students now back on college campuses are experiencing not only the stress that comes from entering young adulthood, but also the added burden of the COVID-19 pandemic as a backdrop. And while David was lucky to get mental health care, many college students experience long wait times to see a counselor as UW and other universities across Washington state struggle to keep up with demand.</p>

Even before the pandemic, college and university counseling systems couldn't provide enough services for students. COVID-19 exacerbated the problem, and it worsened as students returned to classes in person.

Staffing shortage

In an average school year, the UW Counseling Center sees about 4,000 students — mostly undergraduates — out of a population of 46,000 at the Seattle campus. At the start of the pandemic in 2020, demand for services dropped as students quarantined at home, according to staff at the center. Students out of state were not eligible for the university's teletherapy, and some new students didn't even know counseling services were available to them.

In 2021, as in-person classes returned, the demand for services grew again. Especially as finals approach, students reach out for help dealing with stress.

According to a 2020 [report](#) on student mental health at the UW, about 28% of students coming in for services reported depression, followed by anxiety and eating disorders. More than a quarter have been diagnosed with a mental disorder at some point, and 1 in 5 have reported nonsuicidal self-harm. Both young women and men use the center in equal numbers, though clients are mostly white and Asian.

Despite being home to one of the best psychiatric teaching hospitals in the region, the university doesn't have the staff to help all the students who want or need services. Currently, the UW Counseling Center has 34 staff members, including licensed psychologists, social workers and therapists.

"If we were able to serve all of [our students], and we were able to serve them for as many sessions as they needed, we would need more than 200 counselors, which honestly is not possible," said Natacha Foo Kune, a psychologist and the director of the counseling center.

And that was before the pandemic stressed out students and their families, as people worried about health, finances and political issues. With the virus, there were also moments of recalibration for mental health providers who contemplated their futures. The university lost several of its staffers, though it has since hired more.

Some realized they could set up a private practice from home and be fully booked with private practice clients within weeks — they didn't need to deal with insurers and could work out of their living rooms.

"They make more money working less hours. I can't fault people for that," said Foo Kune, noting that especially for families with children and caretaking responsibilities, the flexible option was a better fit.

To compensate, the center prioritizes students who need the highest levels of care immediately — students like David.

Other students, like Rachael McDonald, don't get care. She waited two months before giving up.

A junior studying political science, McDonald was diagnosed with anxiety and reached out to the UW Counseling Center in January to get set up with a therapist and psychiatrist. She was seen once for a consultation and told she might be able to see someone in March. She called a few more times to check for cancellations but ultimately looked elsewhere for a private practitioner.

"I really was hoping to get [care at UW] because when you have a team like that in school, they can communicate with a disability team," said McDonald. "[A team] that can say, 'She deals with really severe anxiety so we can give her extra time on the test or let her take it in a quiet environment.' It makes it that much harder to advocate for yourself because the resources aren't as accessible."

Long waits

It's not just the University of Washington that is facing this dilemma.

Central Washington University is down 2 1/2 staff positions (some people work part-time) on a team of 11 people. Together they see around 1,000 students a year, or 10% of the student population.

Cindy Bruns, the director of student counseling services at the university in Ellensburg, said students don't have many options outside the school. "CWU exists really in a medical desert, in terms of outside resources," she said.

The city has one mental health agency in town; Bruns says some people wait up to about six months to see a practitioner. Though there are some private therapists, many don't take insurance. According to the American Medical Association's Workforce Mapper, there were two psychiatrists in the county at the 2010 census count; Bruns says she doesn't know of any now.

Washington State University likewise faced staffing shortages, leading to longer wait times for students.

"Ideally, a student would be able to be seen within two to three weeks," said Jennifer Ellsworth, the director of counseling and psychological services on the Pullman campus.

"Last semester, [the wait time] was as long as six weeks, which is so discouraging to see. We know that six weeks later is a huge portion of the semester."

A broader shortage of mental health workers is well documented in Washington state and around the country, but for counselors who work with college students, the issue precedes the pandemic.

University Counseling Jobs, an online job board, has recorded a steady increase in demand for providers over the last five years. Though COVID-19 caused many colleges and universities to implement hiring freezes in 2020, that changed in 2021 and job posts increased by 60% on the site.

According to a separate 2021 [report](#) from the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, more than half of counseling centers reported turnover in one or more positions, and 70% reported difficulty recruiting.

"The request for care at college counseling centers has far surpassed the rate of enrollment," said Meghann Gerber, a former director of the UW Counseling Center who is now in private practice. "There's just a much larger proportion of people needing support."

Campuswide concern

The college experience is a time of transition; a place for young people to learn, plan the start of their professional careers and explore their identities. But college also overlaps with a time when the adolescent brain is still developing. Three quarters [of mental illnesses begin by age 24](#), and stress itself is a known factor in the development of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.

From scholarship applications to competitive classes, campuses are taxing environments. Add in student loans and part-time jobs, and it can add up to devastating stress. A 2012 [report](#) by the National Alliance on Mental Illness found that among students who dropped out of college, 64% said it was related to their mental health.

As McDonald put it, "You can't write a paper if you're too depressed or too anxious. You can try but that's not going to be as successful as your normal baseline."

That's why early intervention is vital, experts emphasize. Students can learn healthy coping mechanisms and start treatment, which can positively affect the rest of their lives.

So how can colleges do that?

Foo Kune points to two key changes: more funding and an overall cultural shift on college campuses.

	<p>Federal money from the 2020 CARES Act meant an additional \$1 million arrived to fund mental health at UW. The counseling center used it to contract with a service to provide counseling across the U.S., and even internationally, for students who don't live in Washington. Still, more is needed, Foo Kune said.</p> <p>She also hopes that, rather than having a counseling center as a primary safety net for students' mental health needs, UW and other campuses will ask professors, students and staff to prioritize mental health.</p> <p>That can mean accommodations for students like flexible deadlines, and more prevention services like peer support groups and wellness programs for stress management. Students like David and McDonald agree those changes could help students like them cope with the challenges of school in a world rebounding from a pandemic.</p> <p>"The mental health of students is not just resting on the shoulders of the mental health professionals," said Foo Kune. "It actually rests on the shoulders of the entire campus."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Gun deaths at record in pandemic first year
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/10/health/cdc-gun-violence-pandemic.html
GIST	<p>Gun deaths reached the highest number ever recorded in the United States in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, as gun-related homicides surged by 35%, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Tuesday.</p> <p>"This is a historic increase, with the rate having reached the highest level in over 25 years," Dr. Debra E. Houry, acting principal deputy director of the CDC and the director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, said at a news briefing.</p> <p>More than 45,000 Americans died in gun-related incidents as the pandemic spread in the United States, the highest number on record, federal data show. The gun homicide rate was the highest reported since 1994.</p> <p>That represents the largest one-year increase in modern history, according to Ari Davis, a policy adviser at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, which recently released its own analysis of CDC data.</p> <p>Cities from coast to coast have seen bloody episodes of gun violence since the pandemic began, but the new report is official confirmation of something that many Americans had already sensed: Amid the stress and upheaval, citizens turned to guns in numbers rarely seen.</p> <p>The new numbers reveal not only startling increases in the rates of gun homicide, but also document "widened disparities" that existed even before the pandemic began, the CDC said.</p> <p>Homicides involving firearms were generally highest, and showed the largest increases, in poor communities, and exacted a disproportionate toll on younger Black men in particular. Deaths of Black women, though smaller in number, also increased significantly.</p> <p>More than half of gun deaths were suicides, however, and that number did not substantially increase from 2019 to 2020. The overall rise in gun deaths therefore was 15% in 2020, the CDC said.</p> <p>The rise in gun violence has afflicted cities large and small, in both blue and red states, leaving law enforcement scrambling for answers. In many places, like Los Angeles and Denver, the increases have persisted in 2021, and trends this year show no sign of a reversal.</p> <p>"We have two things together: the trauma of the past two years, and the mental health crisis that came out of this pandemic," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said this year at an event to discuss crime. "Those things have caused us to see more violence."</p>

Christopher Herrmann, an assistant professor in the Department of Law and Police Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, said he was not surprised by the CDC's analysis but was worried by what it might augur in the coming summer, when there are typically more gun homicides.

"June, July, August are always the biggest shooting months," he said, adding that most large American cities see about a 30% uptick in shootings and homicides in the summer.

Federal officials and outside experts were not certain what caused the surge in gun deaths.

"One possible explanation is stressors associated with the COVID pandemic that could have played a role, including changes and disruption to services and education, social isolation, housing instability and difficulty covering daily expenses," said Thomas R. Simon, associate director for science at the CDC's division of violence prevention.

The rise also corresponded to accelerated sales of firearms as the pandemic spread and lockdowns became the norm, the CDC analysis noted. Americans went on a gun-buying spree in 2020 that continued into 2021, when in a single week the FBI reported a record 1.2 million background checks.

The primary reason people give for purchasing a handgun is self-protection. But research published in the 1990s established that simply having a gun in the home increases the risk of a gun homicide by a factor of three, and increases the risk of a suicide by a factor of five.

Today, gun buying has largely returned to pre-pandemic levels, but there remain roughly 15 million more guns in circulation than there would be without the pandemic, according to Garen J. Wintemute, a gun violence researcher at the University of California, Davis.

But gun homicide has many roots. Federal researchers also cited disruptions in routine health care; protests over police use of lethal force; a rise in domestic violence; inequitable access to health care; and long-standing systemic racism that has contributed to poor housing conditions, limited educational opportunities and high poverty rates.

Law enforcement officials and criminologists pointed not just to the pandemic, but also to the divisive presidential election in 2020, as gun buying tends to increase at times of deep political polarization.

And there is a sense, harder to quantify, that psyches are frayed — that citizens may be quicker to turn to violence when provoked.

"Something has happened to the American people during this two years that has taken violence to a new level," said Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a nonprofit that studies law enforcement policy.

"We don't know what it is, but if you talk to police chiefs they will tell you that what used to be some small altercation now becomes a shooting and a homicide."

Black Americans remained disproportionately affected by gun violence in 2020. Firearm homicide rates increased by 39.5% among Black people from 2019 to 2020, to 11,904. The victims were overwhelmingly young men.

The Johns Hopkins analysis found that Black men ages 15-34 accounted for 38% of all gun homicide victims in 2020, though this group represented just 2% of the U.S. population.

Black men ages 15-34 were more than 20 times more likely to be killed with a gun than white men of the same age. The number of Black women killed by guns also increased by almost 50% in 2020 compared with 2019, Davis said.

Rising rates of gun-related homicides were seen in all racial and ethnic groups, except among Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, who saw a small decrease.

Gun-related suicides have long been more common among older white men. But in 2020, rates rose mostly sharply among Native Americans and Alaska Native groups, although the numbers were still small compared with those among white men.

“We’re going to need to develop different types of solutions to deal with different types of gun violence,” Davis said.

The last time homicide rates involving firearms peaked was during the crack epidemic of 1993-94, said Andrew Morral, a senior behavioral scientist at RAND Corp. and the director of the National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research. Rates declined until 2015, but have been inching up ever since.

“It’s pretty alarming,” Morral said. “It’s a bigger jump than I would have expected.”

But there is no solid explanation for the decline or the rise, he added: “In a sense it’s a mystery. It’s the big question everyone wants the answer to. Everyone has a theory, but it’s very hard to test the theories.”

Even if the pandemic is part of the answer, “that doesn’t explain why rates have been rising since 2016,” he said.

The CDC is funding 18 research projects aimed at identifying causes of gun violence and developing solutions. The research spans a broad range of interventions: One experiment relies on outreach workers to mediate potentially lethal conflicts in a community, while another provides services to teens and young adults who have been hospitalized with gun injuries.

Others involve distribution of free lockboxes for storing firearms safely in the home.

Projects like these were frozen under the 1996 Dickey Amendment, named after Rep. Jay Dickey, R-Ark., which barred the CDC from spending money to advocate or promote gun control.

Congress has restored \$25 million in funding for firearm injury prevention research, which is split between the CDC and the National Institutes of Health.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Seattle clears park’s homeless encampment
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/seattle-clears-woodland-park-homeless-encampment-after-months-of-trying-to-place-people-into-shelter/
GIST	<p>City crews began dismantling more than 40 tents and structures at Woodland Park on Tuesday morning, capping months of sustained outreach to the people living there and tension with neighbors and park users.</p> <p>The Woodland Park encampment, which is among the largest remaining in a Seattle park, has been a top focus for Mayor Bruce Harrell. He held a campaign event at adjoining Green Lake Park during his run for mayor, saying that he would escalate enforcement of camping laws and increase “consequences” for people who do not go to shelter.</p> <p>Since taking office, he has largely delivered on returning to the pre-pandemic status quo of encampment removals – camps are removed after shorter notice and police are again present.</p> <p>However, the Woodland Park encampment has been an exception to that approach.</p> <p>An encampment at Green Lake, at the north end of the park, was cleared about six months ago after neighbors and people who use the park complained that their access was limited by the growing number of tents and people living outside.</p>

Some people who were cleared from around Green Lake moved south to Woodland Park, joining those already there.

In January, 80 people were estimated to be living there. In February, the city counted 61, but it's often difficult to get an exact count because people come and go.

Paul Kostek, chair of the Greenlake Community Council, a neighborhood group with members near both parks, says the Woodland Park removal was a long time coming.

"It turns it back to who it's supposed to serve," Kostek said. "It's supposed to be a park for everyone to use and not have people in the mode where they're very uncomfortable using the facilities."

He has lived in the area for 25 years and said that the encampment ballooned during the pandemic. Across the city, social services contracted as coronavirus precautions increased, leaving many people on the street. At the same time, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised cities to stop moving homeless residents from one place to another.

The encampment's size and visibility is unusual for the Green Lake and Woodland parks area, where Kostek said homeless neighbors are usually older and there are fewer of them.

Citing the encampments, organizers of annual [cross country events](#) with thousands of participants at Lower Woodland Park last year either relocated or canceled their meets. Members of a lawn bowling club, as well as runners and other people who use the parks for sports and recreation activities, said they felt unsafe or found amenities inaccessible because of the tents and apparent drug use.

Over the last four months, the city's HOPE team, which coordinates outreach services for encampment removals, have worked with partners to assess residents' needs and offer them shelter.

Many people moved out of the park voluntarily.

As of Tuesday morning, 4 people from that February count remained at the park; the city said the residents and service providers couldn't reach agreement on placement.

"The city has enough tiny-house village and enhanced shelter options to accommodate all those remaining on site today and everyone on site will have received a legitimate offer of shelter," Jamie Housen, a Harrell spokesperson, said in an email Tuesday. "Some have received numerous offers of shelter."

The mayor's office said it had referred 83 individuals to some form of shelter, a number that it called "unprecedented."

On Tuesday, four days after the city posted a notice stating that all belongings must be removed from the park, rain poured as people began to pack up. Volunteers who said they were neighbors helped residents load garbage bags full of belongings into cars. Two former residents of the park embraced before one of them got in a car.

Just after 9 a.m., city staff cordoned off a section of the park and began tearing down the more than half-dozen tents and structures on the northwest edge of the park near Aurora Avenue.

As city crews worked, 10 police officers stood by, corralling spectators. Once the tents came down, two excavators scooped up what remained of people's belongings and trash into dump trucks.

David Sandoval, who has been living in the park since last winter, watched the encampment grow substantially in recent months.

"I'm pretty sure because they see on the news, and the word around here, that people in the park are getting housing," Sandoval said. "Because, I mean, nobody wants to stay like this."

For Sandoval, the city's offer of shelter where dozens of people share living space does not suit his needs because of health concerns. He had originally accepted the referral, but thinks he may be back out in a tent.

"It's just hygiene. COVID," Sandoval said. "Some people don't like to keep up hygiene, some do things that, you know, have their hands in places that they don't need to have them in and just touch all over everything else."

Seattle City Councilmember Dan Strauss, whose district includes Woodland Park, said the outreach for Woodland Park took longer than at Green Lake or [Ballard Commons Park](#), because more shelter space was available then.

He said in the case of Woodland Park, the city had to rely on the natural cycling of the city's shelter system. Plus, because the city was reserving capacity for Woodland Park residents, Strauss said "the drawbacks are the other parts of the city don't receive the shelter availability."

He suggested more shelter capacity would alleviate that issue.

"For individuals, it might not be the right time, they might not feel ready to move inside. And that's a personal choice," Strauss said. "It's the city's duty and responsibility to be able to restore the parks for their use as designed and to ensure that we are taking the time to build the relationships that do help people move inside."

Andrea Lolë began to pack up her wet belongings and tent before crews arrived. Lolë has been living in the park on and off for the past year. She appreciates that people in the park help each other, she said, as she handed another resident a headlamp. Extension cords from a single tent's generator stretched to at least five other tents to provide power and heat.

Lolë has an apartment in Bellevue through the legal system diversion program LEAD, but says she can't stay there because she was asked to get rid of her dog, Ragnar, who she's had for two years.

She said the city's outreach workers did not offer her a different housing option. She understands that neighbors want access to the park, but said that perhaps they could coexist with those living outdoors.

"So the ones that are going to get housing, great. But the ones that are not, maybe seclude them away from the public," Lolë said.

She said she and Ragnar didn't know where they would go after they left the park.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Covid tougher to track as testing plunges
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Pandemic-gets-tougher-to-track-as-COVID-testing-17162260.php
GIST	<p>Testing for COVID-19 has plummeted across the globe, making it much tougher for scientists to track the course of the pandemic and spot new, worrisome viral mutants as they emerge and spread.</p> <p>Experts say testing has dropped by 70 to 90% worldwide from the first to the second quarter of this year — the opposite of what they say should be happening with new omicron variants on the rise in places such as the United States and South Africa.</p> <p>"We're not testing anywhere near where we might need to," said Dr. Krishna Udayakumar, who directs the Duke Global Health Innovation Center at Duke University. "We need the ability to ramp up testing as we're seeing the emergence of new waves or surges to track what's happening" and respond.</p>

Reported daily cases in the U.S., for example, are averaging 73,633, up more than 40% over the past two weeks, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University. But that is a vast undercount because of the testing downturn and the fact tests are being taken at home and not reported to health departments. An influential modeling group at the University of Washington in Seattle estimates that only 13% of cases are being reported to health authorities in the U.S. — which would mean more than a half million new infections every day.

The drop in testing is global but the overall rates are especially inadequate in the developing world, Udayakumar said. The number of tests per 1,000 people in high income countries is around 96 times higher than it is in low income countries, according to the Geneva-based public health nonprofit FIND.

What's driving the drop? Experts point to COVID fatigue, a lull in cases after the first omicron wave and a sense among some residents of low-income countries that there's no reason to test because they lack access to antiviral medications.

At a recent press briefing by the World Health Organization, FIND CEO Dr. Bill Rodriguez called testing "the first casualty of a global decision to let down our guard" and said "we're becoming blind to what is happening with the virus."

Testing, genomic sequencing and delving into case spikes can lead to the discovery of new variants. New York state health officials found the super contagious BA.2.12.1 variant after investigating higher-than-average case rates in the central part of the state.

Going forward, "we're just not going to see the new variants emerge the way we saw previous variants emerge," Rodriguez told The Associated Press.

Testing increases as infections rise and people develop symptoms — and it falls along with lulls in new cases. Testing is rising again in the U.S. along with the recent surge.

But experts are concerned about the size of the drop after the first omicron surge, the low overall levels of testing globally, and the inability to track cases reliably. While home tests are convenient, only tests sent to labs can be used to detect variants. If fewer tests are being done, and fewer of those tests are processed in labs, fewer positive samples are available for sequencing.

Also, home test results are largely invisible to tracking systems.

Mara Aspinall, managing director of an Arizona-based consulting company that tracks COVID-19 testing trends, said there's at least four times more home testing than PCR testing, and "we are getting essentially zero data from the testing that's happening at home."

That's because there's no uniform mechanism for people to report results to understaffed local health departments. The CDC strongly encourages people to tell their doctors, who in most places must report COVID-19 diagnoses to public health authorities.

Generally, though, results from home tests fall under the radar.

Reva Seville, a 36-year-old Los Angeles parent, tested herself at home this week after she began feeling symptoms such as a scratchy throat, coughing and congestion. After the results came back positive, she tested twice more just to be sure. But her symptoms were mild, so she didn't plan to go to the doctor or report her results to anyone.

Beth Barton of Washington, Missouri, who works in construction, said she's taken about 10 home tests, either before visiting her parents or when she's had symptoms she thought might be COVID-19. All came back negative. She shared the results with the people around her but didn't know how to report them.

“There should be a whole system for that,” said Barton, 42. “We as a society don’t know how to gauge where we’re at.”

Aspinall said one potential solution would be to use technology like scanning a QR code to report home test results confidentially.

Another way to keep better track of the pandemic, experts said, is to bolster other types of surveillance, such as wastewater monitoring and collecting hospitalization data. But those have their own drawbacks. Wastewater surveillance remains a patchwork that doesn’t cover all areas, and hospitalization trends lag behind cases.

Udayakumar said scientists across the world must use all the tracking methods at their disposal to keep up with the virus, and will need to do so for months or even years.

At the same time, he said, steps must be taken to boost testing in lower-income countries. Demand for tests would rise if access to antivirals were improved in these places, he said. And one of the best ways to increase testing is to integrate it into existing health services, said Wadzanayi Muchenje, who leads health and strategic partnerships in Africa for The Rockefeller Foundation.

Georges Benjamin, executive director of the American Public Health Association, said there will come a point when the world stops widespread testing for COVID-19 – but that day isn’t here yet.

With the pandemic lingering and virus still unpredictable, “it’s not acceptable for us to only be concerned about individual health,” he said. “We have to worry about the population.”

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HEADLINE	05/10 New seaplane operations; Tacoma tourists
SOURCE	https://www.thenewtribune.com/news/business/article261312822.html
GIST	<p>The Puyallup Tribe of Indians and Kenmore Air announced Tuesday plans for new seaplane operations to bring more tourists to the Tacoma area and as a way to boost the Tribe’s casino and hospitality operations.</p> <p>According to the announcement, the partners will build a new dock and terminal on land the Tribe owns along Ruston Way in Tacoma.</p> <p>The RAM Restaurant and Brewery has been operating under a lease at the site since the Tribe’s purchase, and a second building on the property, formerly C.I. Shenanigan’s, will undergo renovations for a new Native/internationally inspired restaurant led by chef Roy Yamaguchi.</p> <p>The new restaurant and seaplane terminal are scheduled to begin operations in late 2023, according to the announcement.</p> <p>“No other Tribe in our country has an operation like this,” said the Puyallup Tribal Council in the announcement. “With Kenmore Air, we’re opening up Tacoma to the Northwest and the Northwest to Tacoma.”</p> <p>“We are honored to work with the Puyallup Tribe and thrilled to bring seaplane service to the homelands of the Puyallup people and to South Puget Sound,” said Todd Banks, president of Kenmore Air, in the release.</p> <p>According to the release, “The new terminal will open rapid travel to and from many of the state’s most desired visitor and hospitality locations. Initial routes will be to Victoria, B.C., and the San Juan Islands.”</p> <p>It added, “Sightseeing and other charter services will also be available from Tacoma.”</p>

	<p>One plane will be in service the first year, with potentially more added as the business grows. Plans include the plane flying with the Tribe's and Emerald Queen Casino's logos.</p> <p>Kenmore Air and the Tribe also plan to create an aviation job-training program for interested Puyallup tribal members.</p> <p>"This will create opportunities for our young people to engage in all aspects of seaplane operations including flight training, aircraft maintenance and terminal operations," Tribal Council said in the announcement.</p> <p>The vision, according to the announcement, is to open "the Tribe's casinos and hospitality venues to international visitors from British Columbia and beyond."</p> <p>The Tribe aims to grow business at its \$400 million Emerald Queen Casino, 2920 E. R St., in Tacoma, along with an adjacent 155-room luxury hotel, which opened in December 2021.</p> <p>The Tribe also operates an EQC casino/hotel in Fife, 5700 Pacific Highway E. The Tribe recently partnered with BetMGM to launch EQC Sportsbook at its casinos.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	05/10 Cryptocurrencies keep crashing
SOURCE	https://time.com/6175370/why-bitcoin-crashing/
GIST	<p>Bitcoin took a brutal fall on Monday, briefly dipping below \$30,000 for the first time since July 2021. The world's largest cryptocurrency is now worth less than half of what it was in the fall. Other cryptocurrencies, like Ether and BNB, have seen similar falls, while trading volumes have also tapered off on major exchanges. Some experts are now warning of a "crypto winter," in which the sector's astonishing growth is replaced by an extended period of contraction.</p> <p>The current slide of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies is being caused by a combination of short-term and long-term inputs, including larger financial markets and the crashing of a major stablecoin. Here are some of the main factors leading to the current slump.</p> <p>Bitcoin is connected to the rest of the financial market.</p> <p>Crypto evangelists have long hoped that the independent nature of crypto would make it resistant to inflation and crises. Bitcoin, the number one cryptocurrency, has no central issuer or authority controlling it. That independence from government, many argued, should ensure that Bitcoin would hold its value through economic dips, international wars or drastic policy changes.</p> <p>But the last couple of years have proven this is false. When the coronavirus pandemic crushed global markets in March 2020, so too fell Bitcoin, falling by 57%. Stock markets and cryptocurrencies then both recovered and rose at a staggering rate, which analysts believe was caused by a combination of free time, disposable income, and pandemic-relief money pumped into the world by governments.</p> <p>But lately, investors have been wary that change is in the air, as inflation led the Federal Reserve and other central banks to raise interest rates. For investors looking for a safe port, Bitcoin, which swings wildly by nature, may seem too risky.</p> <p>Bitcoin's fall comes on the heels of the Dow and Nasdaq's worst single-day declines since 2020, as well as the S&P 500 hitting its nadir in the past year. The market has been unsettled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has exacerbated inflation, supply chain issues and oil prices. Slowed growth in China amidst COVID-19 outbreaks there are also contributing to financial anxieties. Some crypto evangelists predict</p>

that Bitcoin's price will decouple from the stock market down the road—but for now, the two are very much intertwined.

Crypto is inherently volatile.

Even the biggest crypto boosters will tell you that success in the crypto world is far from guaranteed. Its volatility is part of its very appeal to many speculators: that they could make money at rates far faster than that of normal stock brokers.

But with the promise of the boom also comes that of the bust. Since Bitcoin's inception in 2009, there have been several major bear- and bull- cycles, with short-term investors alternately flooding the market and then losing interest.

Many exchanges, especially during high times, offer inherently risky propositions, allowing traders to [invest with borrowed crypto](#). If prices start to drop, whether due to big investors selling off their shares or other reasons, a lack of actual cash flow can contribute to even faster free-falls.

The volume of people investing in crypto at any given time is highly variable as well: More than half of traders who held crypto at the end of 2021 had only entered the market that year, [according to](#) crypto firm Grayscale Investments. And it's no accident that crypto crashes tend to occur over weekends. That's when investors tend to tune out, so the ones who are making trades can make bigger waves.

Worries about regulation and security breaches

Given that crypto derives some of its value from people's belief in it, markets can be rattled by surrounding skepticism or policy changes. China's crackdown on bitcoin mining in mid-2021, for example, [led to Bitcoin crashing](#) from \$65,000 in April to \$35,000 in June. The total market capitalization of crypto similarly fell around that time when Elon Musk announced Tesla would [no longer accept bitcoin](#) for payments in May 2021, citing environmental reasons.

Many crypto investors have watched anxiously as governments of countries central to crypto trading or mining—including the U.S., China, India and Germany—have moved toward regulation. Meanwhile, crypto has been shaken by a wave of hacks and security breaches, including a \$600 million hack of the Ethereum sidechain Ronin. These hacks have shaken consumer confidence in crypto and slowed growth from new potential buyers entering the field.

The number of real-world use cases that would bring newcomers into the crypto space seems to be slowing this year, Edward Moya, senior market analyst at Oanda, told CBS News. "There's a belief that mainstream adoption [of Bitcoin] is taking a lot longer than people expected," [Moya said](#). "Right now, what we're seeing is that the crypto market is in a wait-and-see mode."

UST

Some experts also believe that the recent struggles of UST, TerraUSD, one of the largest stablecoins, played a role in the most recent Bitcoin crash. TerraUSD, also known as UST, is a token that is designed to always be worth \$1, but sank below 70 cents on Monday as holders panicked and sold off their tokens en masse in a pseudo-bank-run.

In order to defend UST's price, the Luna Foundation Guard, which safeguards the stablecoin, drained its \$1.3 billion bitcoin reserve and bought \$850 million more in Bitcoin. "That [action could] add meaningful sell pressure on bitcoin and could drag down markets with it," Corey Miller, growth lead at dYdX, [told TechCrunch](#). Caleb Franzen, a senior market analyst at Cubic Analytics, explained in the same article that "historically negative performance" and "historically negative sentiment" can lead to "continued selloff," which impacts prices negatively.

Big picture

Whether the crypto slide continues remains to be seen. [Some believe](#) that things will only get worse as more and more investors panic. But after the price of Bitcoin dropped below \$30,000, its price corrected when evangelists "bought the dip," or entered the market at a discounted rate. They believe that amidst its day-

	to-day turbulence, Bitcoin will continue its zoomed-out growth pattern that it has displayed over the last decade.
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HEADLINE	05/10 Russia high-tech brain drain
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/cream-of-the-cream-russias-high-tech-brain-drain/
GIST	<p>Nikita Shevchenko, 22, bought a one-way ticket out of Russia on February 24 – the day the invasion of Ukraine began. “I opened my phone and the first messages that I saw were like, you know, booms and bombings and dead bodies,” he said. “As soon as the war happened, all of my plans changed completely within basically 30 minutes.”</p> <p>Portugal seemed like a good place to start. He’d been there before, it was beautiful, and seemed like a base from which he could make other plans. He bought a ticket and headed for the airport. But it turned out there was a hitch: The flight to Portugal had a stop in Poland, and a border guard stopped him and said he couldn’t go through.</p> <p>“I like what the f***,” he said later. “And she’s like, Poland doesn’t accept Russian people anymore.”</p> <p>He called friends and family and his assistant and found a flight to Greece. It took him two days of hopping flights and stopping at border crossings to get to Portugal. Shevchenko was part of the first wave of IT professionals who headed for the exits in the days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Tethered to the global digital economy and unable to do their work amid sanctions and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s increasingly hard line on dissent, a wave of digital nomads have fanned out across the globe to watch events unfolding in Ukraine from a distance.</p> <p>Their rush to leave and perhaps never return presents an enormous challenge for Putin, who has introduced a roster of financial incentives for tech companies and their workers in a bid to keep them home. The incentives range from lower tax rates to favorable mortgage deals to promises not to draft them. It doesn’t appear to have been enough.</p> <p>The Russian Association for Electronic Communications – a tech trade association – said last month that as many as 70,000 tech workers have fled the country so far, and their economists expect that number to more than double by this summer. If their estimates are correct, that would mean some 10 percent of Russia’s IT workforce will have decamped to far-flung places around the world.</p> <p>“I don’t think Russia will be the same for decades to come,” Shevchenko said, “all my friends have left.”</p> <p>While the staples of Russia’s economy are oil and minerals, Putin has tried to diversify by encouraging IT workers to code for Mother Russia. Partly as a result, Russia produces some of the world’s most talented software engineers and web developers. Telegram and Yandex – Russia’s answer to Google – were created by homegrown entrepreneurs, the very kinds of tech workers who, like Shevchenko, are heading for the exits.</p> <p>Click Here spoke with three members of the Great Russian Migration: a nimble entrepreneur, a corporate leader with her family, and a high school computer whiz who can’t wait to leave. Shevchenko says it’s bleak: “Russia won’t be the same for decades,” he predicted.</p> <p>‘We love no code’</p> <p>Shevchenko’s new San Francisco home has shiny wood floors and smells like new furniture. There are bottles of wine on the kitchen counter and a new microwave, still in the box, unopened by the kitchen island. He arrived just a few days before, but it looked like he intended to stay awhile.</p> <p>Before the war, Shevchenko had founded a small tech company called WeLoveNoCode. It helps businesses build websites with blocks of code, sort of like Lego, instead using developers and web designers. As a result, it is much cheaper to build a website from scratch. Shevchenko says he doesn’t need</p>

coders, he just needs people who know how to put the blocks together. “So we help companies to build products without code, basically, as simple as that,” he said.

He says it is hard to be a Russian businessman right now. He was in the process of going back to investors for more seed capital when the invasion occurred. A potential investor turned on him and told him to “go burn in hell” because he was Russian. He said it was a reaction to the war. All Russians are tarred with the same brush, he said: “People make assumptions.”

Shevchenko lived and worked in Ukraine for years and has been spending a lot of his time trying to help his 50 employees there leave. “I understand the pain, it’s like very, very, very sad for me. We spent 10 percent of all of our revenue to help Ukrainians and I don’t support the war,” he said. “A lot of Russians don’t support the war.”

While he wouldn’t go so far as to say he saw the invasion coming, he does allow that he was afraid it would happen, so he began moving employees out of Ukraine months ago. “We paid for the tickets to different countries in Europe so that they will just leave and so that they can work and their families will be safe,” he said. “Back then we had 10 or so working in Ukraine and almost all of them left.”

As the war rages on, Shevchenko says his Russian employees are asking to leave too. Shevchenko says 80 percent of his Russian workforce wants to go elsewhere and while he’s tried to relocate everyone “with the amount of cash that we have, it’s just not possible. We are trying our best.”

He says that by just encouraging and enabling this exodus of talent from Ukraine and Russia, he’s running afoul of Moscow. “If we count the number of laws that I broke, it would be the minimum of 20 years,” he said, laughing. “Starting with helping Ukrainians and ending with propagandizing an anti-Russian vision.”

The so-called anti-Russian vision is calling the invasion of Ukraine what it is: a war. Moscow’s preferred language is “special operation.” Shevchenko has also dared to suggest that Russia isn’t winning, which is a crime too. Needless to say, he says he has no plans to return.

Educating Yandex

Natalia Chebotar’s daughter turned 9 years old on March 1. A video from the day shows her wearing a princess dress from the movie Frozen, looking embarrassed while the adults in the room are singing to her.

Originally, there was supposed to be a big birthday party, with friends from school, party dresses and lots of cake. But Chebotar canceled it after the invasion and had a small family affair instead. The very next day they were on their way to Tbilisi, Georgia.

“I left my car; we left our house, it just stays there,” Chebotar said. “My husband still has business there and he doesn’t know what to do with this business.” He works for an e-commerce company with a long list of international clients. Because of the sanctions, business has cratered.

Chebotar is very well known in Russia, at least in tech circles. She was the chief strategy officer in Yandex’s education division. “Yandex is a kind of Russian Google,” she explained, “and I was in charge of big educational projects.”

Yandex offers Russian language search and, like Google, has dozens and dozens of other products, including a virtual assistant named Alice, a news portal which, recently, seems to only link to a lot of state news sites, and the education products Chebotar managed.

Among other things, she ran a popular tech conference called Ed Crunch and was behind a series of online classes that were like the Russian equivalent of Khan Academy. She also helped introduce digital textbooks into Russia. “My textbooks are now used by 20,000 schools in Russia,” she told me. “That’s half of all schools in Russia.”

All of which makes it particularly striking that Chebotar left. While she quit Yandex last year to do education consulting on her own, her departure was noticed. By her reckoning, Russia's big tech exodus actually started before the war, when Putin began to crack down on dissent and the war only made people leave faster.

'Not every road is open'

Tech people who had jobs that were portable and could speak English just took off, Chebotar said. Their natural connection to the global digital economy meant they felt the squeeze of the sanctions and departure of American companies almost right away. It also provided a natural avenue to leave.

"We have the expression, cream of the cream," she said, speaking of IT executives who departed, though "the bigger problem that everyone is talking about is with technology, with hardware, not with people and software," she said. "I'm not into hard technologies, I'm from the soft part but this problem is quite serious and this can pause lots of initiative and lots of businesses."

The thinking is that as the war grinds on, Russia may have to retool its homegrown computer chip and integrated circuits industry just to keep the nation's war machine humming. Though, at this juncture, it's unclear how local production could possibly make up for the worldwide suppliers who had been providing chips and servers in the past.

Chebotar's daughter, even though she's in Tbilisi, continues to attend her old school – she's taking classes online. Her mother says half of her classmates have moved to different countries and half the teachers have left too, so "now it's kind of a blended classroom. The school doesn't know whether it will open in the same condition in September."

The growing discrimination against emigrating Russians has surprised her, too. One Democratic Congressman from California has suggested we kick every Russian student out of the United States. Meta temporarily allowed Facebook and Instagram users in certain areas to post hate speech against Russia. And while many of the Russians who have left, like Shevchenko and Chebotar, are against the war — they're being discriminated against anyway.

"It's kind of a strange thing because no one is bombing Russia and Ukrainians have this kind of help in different countries," she said carefully. "And it's totally understood. But that means most of the Russians who flee can't even think about asking for help and no one wants to help us."

While her family is luckier than most, Chebotar says this is all very hard. "We have some savings, we know how to find work," she said, "but it's hard to change countries in one day. We're in a better situation than Ukrainians, we've had different kinds of groups with Russian people helping each other. But it's not like every road is open for you. It's not."

'No to war'

When Chebotar was a little girl she used to watch the military parades for Victory Day – May 9 – on television. The day is a special one in Russia. It is seen as the day the world triumphed over Nazism; the day Germany surrendered, ending World War II in Europe.

Every year there is an over-the-top government-orchestrated show of military might: tanks and missiles cross through Red Square, leaders make speeches, and there are local receptions held across the country for veterans of the war. "Each family has veterans; you don't have to look for some, because usually each family has some," she said. She remembers the dinners as solemn occasions.

She worried what this year's May 9 celebrations would set in motion and how President Putin would rally Russian support for the war. "They need to show at least some victory, I wonder how they will show it," she said leading up to Victory Day.

Putin used his speech this year to tell the Russian people that invading Ukraine was the right thing to do and they would stay the course.

Funny thing about that though: the program descriptions on several major Russian television networks changed for part of the day. According to the BBC, in every time slot of the online schedules for one of the state-run channels, for example, the names of the programs had been changed. Instead the guides read: “TV and the authorities are lying... no to war.” Hackers are suspected of being behind the switch.

A computer olympian

Putin added a second military parade to coincide with the one in Moscow this year. It took place in the captured Ukrainian city of Mariupol and seemed sad and hurriedly planned in comparison.

Music blared out of loud speakers, army vehicles drove down the boulevards in single file. No goose-stepping troops or bright uniforms to be seen. The preparations were haphazard. Moscow dispatched people to the city to change road signs into Russian ahead of the ceremonies and to clean unexploded bombs from the streets. They were also instructed to remove the dead bodies.

The Mariupol parade was broadcast on state television to millions of Russians, many of whom saw the pummeling of Mariupol not as a victory, but as a tragedy. We met one of them: an 18-year old high school student we'll call Kirill. Last month, he won a national computing competition.

“I’m finishing school now,” he said. “I really like computers and IT and I’m really good at it. Two weeks ago, I won an Olympiad and now I can enter university without any exams and I don’t need to pay for my education.”

When his mother woke him up for school on February 24, she told him that the war had started. He said he couldn’t describe how it made him feel aside from saying that he stood in the shower and his body started to tremble. “It was the worst morning in my life,” he said.

Things went downhill for his family from there. They had just started construction on a new house and then his father was laid off. He worked for a foreign company that left Russia in response to the sanctions. His mother has a PhD in economics and works for a local company – her salary has been cut in half. His winning the collegiate Olympiad was a bright spot in an otherwise dismal Spring.

“All my classmates do not support the war, except for three people,” he said, though he said everyone is being careful because standing up against Putin’s actions can get you in trouble. “In Russia, pigeons are a sign of peace. You’re not allowed to paint pigeons for example, on the walls. If you paint a pigeon on the wall, in half an hour, it will be painted over again.”

He says he can’t wait to leave Russia. “I really want to leave,” he said. “My dream is Latvia because there are lots of IT specialists. Latvia is my dream.”

Generational impact.

“That’s a generational impact when you talk about the talent walking out the door,” said Mieke Eoyang, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy. She sees Russia’s brain drain as having long term strategic implications.

“If you are involved in the technology industry and you are interested in developing better products to improve the lives of people around the world, I think Russia has made itself a very difficult place to work and live,” she said. “The export controls and other things that limit their access to Western technology will be really difficult for Russia to reconstitute its military and to maintain its technological edge.”

	She says homegrown technology won't be enough and the great migration of tech workers will only make it harder.
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HEADLINE	05/11 Russia efforts to jam Starlink
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/elon-musk-says-russian-efforts-to-jam-starlink-are-ramping-up/
GIST	<p>Elon Musk has said that Russian attempts to jam or otherwise hack the Starlink satellite communications network have been thwarted so far, but these efforts continue – and are ramping up.</p> <p>The Starlink and Tesla chief was responding to a news story about how the European Union and the US with its Five Eyes partners were blaming the Russian military for a cyberattack on Viasat's KA-SAT network earlier this year.</p> <p>The attack occurred on February 24, one hour before Russian military invaded Ukraine. It caused communication outages across public authorities, businesses and users in Ukraine, and also affected users in several EU member states, the EU said in its statement.</p> <p>Viasat last month confirmed modem-wiping malware knocked out very small-aperture terminals (VSAT) on Viasat's fixed broadband service in Ukraine and parts of Europe connected to its KA-SAT satellite network.</p> <p>Posting a link to a story about the Viasat attack, Musk noted on Twitter: "Starlink has resisted Russian cyberwar jamming & hacking attempts so far, but they're ramping up their efforts."</p> <p>After Russia's invasion of Ukraine damaged the country's internet infrastructure, Ukraine's vice prime minister and minister of digital transformation Mykhailo Fedorov requested help from Musk, who responded by sending Starlink terminals to the country, and has faced attempts to jam or hack the network since.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Fedorov said there were around 150,000 active users of Starlink per day in the country. "This is crucial support for Ukraine's infrastructure and restoring the destroyed territories," he said.</p> <p>Satellite communication has become a key tool, but also a key target for hacking attacks. The National Security Agency (NSA) has updated its advice for satellite operators and their customers to protect networks from cyberattacks for espionage and disruption.</p> <p>"The recent U.S. and European Union public statements noted the Russian military launched cyberattacks against commercial satellite communications to disrupt Ukrainian command and control in February 2022," the NSA said on Tuesday.</p> <p>"This cyber activity against Ukraine further underscores the risk to VSAT communications for both espionage and disruption."</p> <p>A month before Viasat's multi-day outage in Europe, the NSA released recommendations, aimed at US government agencies, to protect VSAT communications because they often aren't encrypted in transit.</p> <p>The NSA warned that VSAT's virtual network separation "cannot be trusted to provide access control, separation, or confidentiality of sensitive information" and recommended the use of VPNs for confidential VSAT communications.</p> <p>The updated advisory from the NSA remains largely the same but includes a new passage acknowledging EU and US attribution to Russian military attacks on VSATs.</p> <p>"According to a recent U.S. and European Union statements, the Russian military launched cyber attacks in late February against commercial satellite communications networks to disrupt Ukrainian command and control during the invasion, and those actions had spillover impacts into other European countries."</p>

The activity disabled VSATs in Ukraine and across Europe, including tens of thousands of terminals outside of Ukraine that, among other things, support wind turbines and provide internet services to private citizens, it adds.

It is extremely rare for the EU to attribute a cyberattack to a third nation. However, it has applied EU-wide sanctions to individuals in North Korea, Russia and China for their roles in past cyberattacks on European countries, albeit several years after attacks like WannaCry and NotPetya took place.

As foreign policy think tank German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) [highlighted](#) in a study of recent cyberattacks, that attribution at the EU level is difficult, partly because only some EU member nations – such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Estonia, Austria, France and Germany – have the technical capability or political will to do so.

Also, under the guidelines of the EU's [2017 cyber diplomacy toolbox](#), the EU has [refrained from attributing cyberattacks to third states](#) because it is a sovereign political decision for each member state.

SWP looked at several recent cyberattacks, including WannaCry and NotPetya from 2017, Operation Cloud Hopper in 2016, the 2015 Bundestag hack, and the 2018 attack on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

"While the Five Eyes intelligence alliance (consisting of the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) coordinates its attribution and public naming and shaming in a manner which has a high media impact, the coordination processes in the EU 27 are naturally slower: months, if not years, pass between a cyber incident and the implementation of sanctions," SWP argued.

The EU said the Russian military attack on Viasat's network was "contrary to the expectations set by all UN Member States, including the Russian Federation, of responsible State behaviour and the intentions of States in cyberspace."

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HEADLINE	05/10 Saintstealer info-stealing malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/05/experts-detail-saintstealer-and-prynt.html
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers have dissected the inner workings of an information-stealing malware called Saintstealer that's designed to siphon credentials and system information.</p> <p>"After execution, the stealer extracts username, passwords, credit card details, etc.," Cyble researchers said in an analysis last week. "The stealer also steals data from various locations across the system and compresses it in a password-protected ZIP file."</p> <p>A 32-bit C# .NET-based executable with the name "saintgang.exe," Saintstealer is equipped with anti-analysis checks, opting to terminate itself if it's running either in a sandboxed or virtual environment.</p> <p>The malware can capture a wide range of information that ranges from taking screenshots to gathering passwords, cookies, and autofill data stored in Chromium-based browsers such as Google Chrome, Opera, Edge, Brave, Vivaldi, and Yandex, among others.</p> <p>It can also steal Discord multi-factor authentication tokens, files with .txt, .doc, and .docx extensions as well as extract information from VimeWorld, Telegram, and VPN apps like NordVPN, OpenVPN, and ProtonVPN.</p> <p>Besides transmitting the compressed information to a Telegram channel, the metadata related to the exfiltrated data is sent to a remote command-and-control (C2) server.</p>

	<p>What's more, the IP address linked to the C2 domain — 141.8.197[.]42 — is tied to multiple stealer families such as Nixscare stealer, BloodyStealer, QuasarRAT, Predator stealer, and EchelonStealer.</p> <p>"Information stealers can be harmful to individuals as well as large organizations," the researchers said. "If even unsophisticated stealers like Saintstealer gain infrastructural access, it could have devastating effects on the cyberinfrastructure of the targeted organization."</p> <p>The disclosure comes as a new infostealer named Prynt Stealer has surfaced in the wild that can also perform keylogging operations and financial theft using a clipper module.</p> <p>"It can target 30+ Chromium-based browsers, 5+ Firefox-based browsers, and a range of VPN, FTP, messaging, and gaming apps," Cyble noted last month.</p> <p>Sold for \$100 for a one-month license and \$900 for a lifetime subscription, the malware joins a long list of other recently advertised stealers, including Jester, BlackGuard, Mars Stealer, META, FFDroider, and Lightning Stealer.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Colonial Pipeline facing \$1M fine
SOURCE	https://nakedsecurity.sophos.com/2022/05/10/colonial-pipeline-facing-1000000-fine-for-poor-recovery-plans/
GIST	<p>If you were in the US this time last year, you won't have forgotten, and you may even have been affected by, the ransomware attack on fuel-pumping company Colonial Pipeline.</p> <p>The organisation was hit by ransomware injected into its network by so-called affiliates of a cybercrime crew known as DarkSide.</p> <p>DarkSide is an example of what's known as RaaS, short for <i>ransomware-as-a-service</i>, where a small core team of criminals create the malware and handle any extortion payments from victims, but don't perform the actual network attacks where the malware gets unleashed.</p> <p>Teams of "affiliates" (field technicians, you might say), sign up to carry out the attacks, usually in return for the lion's share of any blackmail money extracted from victims.</p> <p>The core criminals lurk less visibly in the background, running what is effectively a franchise operation in which they typically pocket 30% (or so they say) of every payment, almost as though they looked to legitimate online services such as Apple's iTunes or Google Play for a percentage that the market was familiar with.</p> <p>The front-line attack teams typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform reconnaissance to find targets they think they can breach. • Break in to selected companies with vulnerabilities they know how to exploit. • Wrangle their way to administrative powers so they are level with the official sysadmins. • Map out the network to find every desktop and server system they can., • Locate and often neutralise existing backups. • Exfiltrate confidential corporate data for extra blackmail leverage. • Open up network backdoors so they can sneak back quickly if they're spotted this time. • Gently probe existing malware defences looking for weak or unprotected spots. • Pick a particularly troublesome time of day or night... <p>...and then they automatically unleash the ransomware code they were supplied with by the core gang members, sometimes scrambling all (or almost all) computers on the network within just a few minutes.</p> <p>Now it's time to pay up</p> <p>The idea behind this sort of attack, as you know, is that the computers aren't wiped out completely.</p>

Indeed, after most ransomware attacks, the Windows operating system still boots up and the primary applications on each computer will still load, almost as a taunt to remind you just how close you are to, yet how far away from, normal operation.

But all the files that you need to keep your business running – databases, documents, spreadsheets, system logs, calendar entries, customer lists, invoices, bank transactions, tax records, shift assignments, delivery schedules, support cases, and so on – end up encrypted.

You can boot your laptop, load up Word, see all your documents, and even try desperately to open them, only to find the digital equivalent of shredded cabbage everywhere.

Only one copy of the decryption key exists – and the ransomware attackers have it!

That's when "negotiations" start, with the criminals hoping that your IT infrastructure will be so hamstrung by the scrambled data as to be dysfunctional.

"Pay us a 'recovery fee'," say the crooks, "and we'll quietly provide you with the decryption tools you need to unscramble all your computers, thus saving you the time needed to restore all your backups. If you even have any working backups."

Of course, they don't put it quite that politely, as this [chilling recording](#) supplied to the [Sophos Rapid Response](#) team reveals....That's the sort of wall against which Colonial Pipeline found itself about 12 months ago

Even though law enforcement groups around the world urge ransomware victims not to pay up (as we know only too well, today's ransomware payments [directly fund](#) tomorrow's ransomware attacks), Colonial apparently decided to hand over what was then \$4.4 million in Bitcoin anyway.

Sadly, as you'll no doubt remember if you followed the story at the time, Colonial ended up in the same sorry state as 4% of the ransomware victims in the [Sophos Ransomware Survey 2021](#): they paid the crooks in full, but were unable to recover the lost data with the decryption tool anyway.

Apparently, the decryptor was so slow as to be [just about useless](#), and Colonial ended up restoring its systems in the same way it would have if it had turned its back on the crooks altogether and paid nothing.

In a fascinating "afterlude" to Colonial's ransomware payment, the US FBI managed, surprisingly quickly, to infiltrate the criminal operation, to acquire the private key or keys for some of the bitcoins paid over to the criminals, to obtain a court warrant, and to ["transfer back" about 85%](#) of the criminal's ill-gotten gains into the safe keeping of the US courts. If you are a ransomware victim yourself, however, remember that this sort of dramatic claw-back is the exception, not the rule.

More woes for Colonial Pipeline

Now, Colonial looks set to be hit by a further demand for money, this time in the form of a \$986,400 [civil penalty](#) proposed by the US Department of Transportation.

Ironically, perhaps, it looks as though Colonial would have been in some trouble even without the ransomware attack, given that the proposed fine comes about as the result of an investigation by the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

That investigation [actually took place](#) from January 2020 to November 2020, the year before the ransomware attack occurred, so the problems that the PHMSA identified existed anyway.

As the PHMSA points out, the primary operational flaw, which accounts for [more than 85%](#) of the fine (\$846,300 out of \$986,400), was *"a probable failure to adequately plan and prepare for manual shutdown and restart of its pipeline system."*

However, as the PHMSA alleges, these failures “*contributed to the national impacts when the pipeline remained out of service after the May 2021 cyber-attack.*”

What about the rest of us?

This may seem like a very special case, given that few of us operate pipelines at all, let alone pipelines of the size and scale of Colonial.

Nevertheless, the official [Notice of Probable Violation](#) lists several related problems from which we can all learn.

In Colonial Pipeline’s case, these problems were found in the so-called SCADA, ICS or OT part of the company, where those acronyms stand for *supervisory control and data acquisition, industrial control systems, and operational technology*.

You can think of OT as the industrial counterpart to IT, but the SecOps (security operations) challenges to both types of network are, unsurprisingly, very similar.

Indeed, as the PHMSA report suggests, even if your OT and IT functions look after two almost entirely separate networks, the potential consequence of SecOps flaws in one side of the business can directly, and even dangerously, affect the other.

Even more importantly, especially for many smaller businesses, is that even if you don’t operate a pipeline, or an electricity supply network, or a power plant...

...you *probably have an OT network of sorts anyway*, made up of IoT (Internet of Things) devices such as security cameras, door locks, motion sensors, and perhaps even a restful-looking computer-controlled aquarium in the reception area.

And if you do have IoT devices in use in your business, those devices are almost certainly sitting on exactly the same network as all your IT systems, so the cybersecurity postures of both types of device are inextricably intertwined.

(There is indeed, as we alluded to above, a famous anecdote about a US casino that suffered a cyberintrusion via a [“connected thermometer” in a fishtank](#) in the lobby.)

The PHMSA report lists seven problems, all falling under the broad heading of *Control Room Management*, which you can think of as the OT equivalent of an IT department's Network Operations Centre (or just "the IT team" in a small business).

These problems distill, loosely speaking, into the following six items:

- Failure to keep a proper record of operational tests that passed.
- Failure to test and verify the operation of alarm and anomaly detectors.
- No advance plan for manual recovery and operation in case of system failure.
- Failure to test backup processes and procedures.
- Poor reporting of missing or temporarily suppressed security checks.

What to do?

Any (or all) of the problem behaviours listed above are easy to fall into by mistake.

For example, in the [Sophos Ransomware Survey 2022](#), about 2/3 of respondents admitted they’d been hit by ransomware attackers in the previous year.

About 2/3 of those ended up with their files actually scrambled (1/3 happily managed to head off the denouement of the attack), and about 1/2 of those ended up doing a deal with the crooks in an attempt to recover.

This suggests that a significant proportion (at least $2/3 \times 2/3 \times 1/2$, or just over one-in-five) IT or SecOps teams dropped the ball in one or more of the categories above.

Those include items 1 and 2 (*are you sure the backup actually worked? did you formally record whether it did?*); item 3 (*what's your Plan B if the crooks wipe out your primary backup?*); item 4 (*have you practised restoring as carefully as you've bothered backing up?*); and item 5 (*are you sure you haven't missed anything that you should have drawn attention to at the time?*).

Likewise, when our [Managed Threat Response](#) (MTR) team get called in to mop up after a ransomware attack, part of their job is to find out how the crooks got in to start with, and how they kept their foothold in the network, lest they simply come back later and repeat the attack.

It's not unusual for the MTR investigation to reveal numerous loopholes that aided the crooks, including item 5 (*anti-malware products that would have stopped the attack turned off "as a temporary workaround" and then forgotten*), item 2 (*plentiful advance warnings of an impending attack either not recorded at all or simply ignored*), and item 1 (*accounts or servers that were supposed to be shut down, but with no records to reveal that the work didn't get done*).

We never tire of saying this on Naked Security, even though it's become a bit of a cliché: Cybersecurity is a journey, not a destination.

Unfortunately for many IT and SecOps teams these days, or for small businesses where a dedicated SecOps team is a luxury that they simply can't afford, it's easy to take a "set-and-forget" approach to cybersecurity, with new settings or policies considered and implemented only occasionally.

If you're stuck in a world of that sort, don't be afraid to reach out for help.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Resurgence Mirai, STRRAT, Emotet botnets
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/news/malware/mirai-strrat-and-emotet-see-resurgence-in-q1-2022
GIST	<p>Nuspire, a leading managed security service provider (MSSP) on Tuesday found that several older botnets saw a resurgence in Q1, including Mirai, STRRAT, and Emotet, according to Nuspire's Q1 2022 Threat Report.</p> <p>Best-known for co-opting IoT devices to launch DDoS attacks, Mirai showed a spike in activity in February 2022.</p> <p>Nuspire said this corresponded with the discovery of Spring4Shell, a zero-day attack on the popular Java web application framework, Spring Core. The attack allows for unauthenticated remote code execution, and data show Mirai exploited this vulnerability to its botnet.</p> <p>The report also found that Visual Basic Application (VBA) trojans continue to be the top malware variant, comprising nearly 30% of all malware variants. According to the report, its activity spiked just prior to Microsoft's announcement of plans to block VBA macros by default on Office products.</p> <p>Scripting languages such as VBA are notoriously hard for anti-virus or EDR engines to detect maliciousness, said John Bambenek, principal threat hunter at Netenrich. Bambenek said unlike compiled languages, pattern matching systems just fall short when it comes to scripting.</p> <p>"Attackers, fully aware of this problem, are increasingly relying on this to get around our detections," Bambenek said. "It's not just VBA. PowerShell is used in almost all advanced attacks at some point in the attack lifecycle. Until we get better at detecting and correlating behaviors, attackers will keep using scripting to eat our lunch."</p> <p>On the resurgence of Mirai, Christopher Prewitt, chief technology officer at MRK Technologies, said sooner or later, "everything old is new again" — and it's Mirai's time.</p>

	“It's a tool, and much like a 30-year-old hammer can still sink a nail into wood, Mirai's codebase is good at both propagation and brute forcing, making it efficient for botnet operators,” Prewitt said.
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HEADLINE	05/10 Return of REvil ransomware?
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/new-malware-samples-indicate-return-revil-ransomware
GIST	<p>New malware samples and a new Tor-based leak website suggest that the REvil ransomware operation has resumed.</p> <p>Secureworks, which tracks the group behind REvil as Gold Southfield, conducted an analysis of malware samples apparently created in March and April, and determined that the developer likely has access to the original REvil source code.</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm Avast reported in late April that it had blocked a ransomware sample that appeared to be a new REvil variant, but said it did not encrypt files and instead it only added a random extension to files. Secureworks said this was a bug introduced by the malware developer and noted that the ransomware is still under active development.</p> <p>Secureworks on Monday detailed the changes seen in recent samples compared to earlier versions of REvil.</p> <p>The domain used by REvil's old leak website now redirects visitors to a new domain, where more than 250 organizations that have been hit are listed, including many of REvil's old targets and what appear to be new victims.</p> <p>The website hosts data allegedly stolen from victims, as well as links to third-party sites that host stolen data.</p> <p>The new ransom note dropped on compromised systems includes links that point to the new .onion domains.</p> <p>The REvil ransomware, aka Sodinokibi, emerged in 2019 and it has been described as a successor of GandCrab.</p> <p>In July 2021, roughly two weeks after the cybercrime group targeted Kaseya and demanded a \$70 million ransom, REvil's website went offline. In October, Tor servers associated with the REvil ransomware gang were seized in a multi-country hack-back operation. One of the group's members had posted a goodbye message on their blog, confirming that their server had been compromised.</p> <p>In late November, it was announced that law enforcement agencies in several countries had arrested individuals allegedly linked to REvil operations. In January 2022, Russian authorities announced that — at the request of the United States — members of the hacker group had been charged and the infrastructure they had been using had been “liquidated.”</p> <p>However, a few weeks later, a security company said it had still been seeing REvil implants, suggesting that the group was not completely gone.</p> <p>New malware samples appear to have been developed in March and April, and the group's infrastructure seems to have resumed activity in April.</p> <p>Bleeping Computer learned from a researcher that one of REvil's original core developers is responsible for relaunching the ransomware operation, which would explain why they have access to the malware's source code.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Phishing targets German automakers
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/german-automakers-targeted-in-year-long-malware-campaign/
GIST	<p>A years-long phishing campaign has targeted German companies in the automotive industry, attempting to infect their systems with password-stealing malware.</p> <p>The targets include both car manufacturers and car dealerships in Germany, and the threat actors have registered multiple lookalike domains for use in their operation by cloning legitimate sites of various organizations in that sector.</p> <p>These sites are used to send phishing emails written in German and host the malware payloads downloaded to targeted systems.</p> <p>Researchers at Check Point discovered this campaign and published a technical report where they presented the details of their findings. According to the report, the campaign started around July 2021 and is still ongoing.</p> <p>Targeting the German auto industry</p> <p>The infection chain begins with an email sent to specific targets containing an ISO disk image file that bypasses many internet security controls.</p> <p>For example, the phishing email below pretends to contain an automobile transfer receipt sent to what appears to be a targeted dealership.</p> <p>This archive, in turn, contains an .HTA file that contains JavaScript or VBScript code execution via HTML smuggling.</p> <p>This is a common technique used by hackers of all skill tiers, from "script kiddies" that rely on automated kits to state-sponsored actors that deploy custom backdoors.</p> <p>While the victim sees a decoy document that is opened by the HTA file, malicious code is executed in the background to fetch the malware payloads and launch them.</p> <p>The MaaS info-stealers used in this campaign vary, including Raccoon Stealer, AZORult, and BitRAT. All three are available for purchase in cybercrime markets and darknet forums.</p> <p>In later versions of the HTA file, PowerShell code runs to change registry values and enable content on the Microsoft Office suite. This makes it unnecessary for the threat actors to trick the recipient into enabling macros and improves their payload drop rate.</p> <p>Targets and attribution</p> <p>Check Point says they could trace these attacks to 14 targeted entities, all German organizations that had some connection to the auto-making industry. However, no specific company names are mentioned in the report.</p> <p>The information-stealing payloads were hosted on a site ("bornagroup[.]ir") registered by an Iranian persona, while the same email was used for the phishing subdomains, like "groupschumecher[.]com".</p> <p>The threat analysts were able to find links to a different phishing operation targeting customers of the Santander Bank, with sites supporting that campaign hosted on an Iranian ISP.</p> <p>In summary, there's a good chance that Iranian threat actors orchestrate the campaign, but Check Point doesn't have enough evidence for attribution.</p>

	Finally, regarding the goals of the campaign, it's most likely industrial espionage or BEC (business email compromise), directed against these firms or their clients, suppliers, and contractors.
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HEADLINE	05/10 FluBot Android malware targets Finland
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/flubot-android-malware-targets-finland-in-new-sms-campaigns/
GIST	<p>Finland's National Cyber Security Center (NCSC-FI) has issued a warning about the FluBot Android malware infections increasing due to a new campaign that relies on SMS and MMS for distribution.</p> <p>FluBot is looking to steal financial account credentials of its victims by overlaying phishing pages on top of the legitimate banking and cryptocurrency applications.</p> <p>Additionally, it can access SMS data, perform phone calls, and monitor incoming notifications to snatch temporary authentication codes like one-time passwords (OTP), required besides the regular login credentials.</p> <p>The Finnish authorities issued a similar warning last year after detecting the distribution of 70,000 malicious messages in just 24 hours.</p> <p>This time, no specific numbers have been provided, but the NCSC-FI stated that "thousands of malicious messages are circulating" to potential victims.</p> <p>SMS lures</p> <p>The FluBot operators use SMS messages claiming to contain links to voicemail, missed call notifications, or alerts about incoming money from an unknown financial transaction.</p> <p>The links in these messages take the victim to a website that hosts the FluBot APK, which the victims are asked to download and install to learn about the transaction details.</p> <p>The application requests victims to grant risky permissions on Android, such as accessing SMS data, managing phone calls, and reading the user's address book.</p> <p>Threat actors use the contacts list to push a second-wave SMS from compromised devices. Because these messages come from a known source, the recipients are more likely to open them and infect their devices.</p> <p>The attackers don't waste any opportunity to monetize and if the malicious SMS reaches an iPhone user, they are redirected to premium subscription frauds and other scams.</p> <p>NCSC-FI clarifies that simply opening the links does not install malware on your device, yet users should avoid installing APKs outside the official Play Store.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Phishing lures: fake Covid safety emails
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/endpoint/new-rat-lurks-behind-covid-phishing-lures
GIST	<p>Phishing emails purporting to contain COVID-19 safety information from the World Health Organization (WHO) are instead phishing lures intended to spread a novel remote-access Trojan (RAT) called Nerbian.</p> <p>A team of Proofpoint researchers have published a report noting that so far, the Nerbian RAT, first spotted on Apr. 26, has spread primarily throughout Italy, Spain, and the UK. Notably, Nerbian is written in the Go language, taking advantage of several open source libraries, the analysts added.</p> <p>The RAT leverages multiple anti-analysis components and has cyber espionage modules for keylogging and screen grabs, researchers said, in addition to typical backdoor functionality.</p>

	<p>Nerbian got its name directly from the malware code, the researchers explained, which references the name of a fictional place from the novel <i>Don Quixote</i>.</p> <p>"Malware authors continue to operate at the intersection of open-source capability and criminal opportunity," Sherrod DeGrippe, vice president of threat research and detection at Proofpoint, told Dark Reading in an emailed statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Sanctions on Russia harder for hackers
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-has-gone-down-because-sanctions-against-russia-are-making-life-harder-for-attackers/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The number of ransomware attacks has gone down in recent months because sanctions against Russia are making it harder for cyber criminals to organise attacks and receive ransom payments, Rob Joyce, director of cybersecurity at the National Security Agency (NSA), has revealed.</p> <p>Ransomware attacks have long been a major cybersecurity issue for organisations around the world, affecting computer networks running critical infrastructure, hospitals, businesses and more.</p> <p>Some of the most significant ransomware events of the past year have hit targets in the United States, including the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack, which restricted gas supplies for large parts of the country – and resulted in a ransom payment of millions of dollars being paid to cyber criminals.</p> <p>"Ransomware is a huge aspect of where we learned cybersecurity is national security. And we're seeing the criminal element push through and impacting not only the businesses, but all the way into governments and society at large," said Joyce, speaking at the National Cyber Security Centre's (NCSC) Cyber UK event in Newport, Wales.</p> <p>Many of the most notorious ransomware gangs are suspected to run out of Russia – and Joyce suggested that sanctions against Russia because of the invasion of Ukraine are making life difficult for cyber criminals based in the country, which has led to a reduction in attacks, at least for now.</p> <p>"One interesting trend we see is, in the last month or two, ransomware is actually down. There's probably a lot of different reasons why that is, but I think one impact is the fallout of Russia-Ukraine," said Joyce.</p> <p>"As we do sanctions and it's harder to move money and it's harder to buy infrastructure on the web, we're seeing them be less effective – and ransomware is a big part of that," he added.</p> <p>But even if there's been a reduction in ransomware attacks, it doesn't mean the issue has suddenly disappeared – as shown by the number of organisations that continue to fall victim to ransomware attacks.</p> <p>In many cases, victims of ransomware attacks still feel as if they've got no choice but to pay a ransom to cyber criminals for the decryption key required to retrieve their encrypted files – despite warnings from cybersecurity agencies and the authorities that this only encourages further ransomware attacks.</p> <p>There are steps that organisations can take to improve cybersecurity and bolster their defences against ransomware and other attacks.</p> <p>Some of the steps recommended by NCSC include applying security patches and updates in a timely manner to stop cyber criminals exploiting known vulnerabilities and to roll out multi-factor authentication to all users to provide an extra barrier against intrusions.</p> <p>It's also recommended that organisations are aware of who and what is on their networks, so suspicious activity can be detected quickly, are regularly backing up their data, and that an incident response strategy is in place, so there's a plan about what to do in a worst-case scenario.</p>

HEADLINE	05/11 Microsoft: ransomware world is changing
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/microsoft-the-ransomware-world-is-changing-heres-what-you-need-to-know/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Microsoft has shone a spotlight on ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS), a style of criminal enterprise that relies on gig workers and is structured around profit sharing to reduce risk borne by a single actor.</p> <p>Microsoft security teams are tracking more than 35 unique ransomware families and 250 threat actors across nation-state, ransomware and criminal activities. RaaS, it says, is a gig economy involving multiple actors around three key pillars.</p> <p>"In the same way our traditional economy has shifted toward gig workers for efficiency, criminals are learning that there's less work and less risk involved by renting or selling their tools for a portion of the profits than performing the attacks themselves," Microsoft Security says in a blogpost.</p> <p>"This industrialization of the cybercrime economy has made it easier for attackers to use ready-made penetration testing and other tools to perform their attacks," it said.</p> <p>RaaS has forced Microsoft to look at attacks differently. It's not one actor, but many, meaning that identifying the ransomware family itself doesn't give defenders the full picture of threats on the network.</p> <p>Stealing data from a target, for example, might be carried out by one group for double extortion, but another group is responsible for developing ransomware payloads, while other RaaS affiliates may deploy a given ransomware payload. In other words, knowing that you've fallen victim to one type of ransomware only tells half the picture, wasting defenders' time chasing down the wrong signals.</p> <p>"Payload-based attribution meant that much of the activity that led to Conti ransomware deployment was attributed to the "Conti Group", even though many affiliates had wildly different tradecraft, skills, and reporting structures," Microsoft notes.</p> <p>"Some Conti affiliates performed small-scale intrusions using the tools offered by the RaaS, while others performed weeks-long operations involving data exfiltration and extortion using their own techniques and tools."</p> <p>Researchers at security firm Intel471 recently detailed the Conti group's cooperation with members of LockBit 2.0, Maze and Ryuk gangs to refine encryption algorithms and ransom notes, and contract developers from other groups to build new ransomware.</p> <p>At a high level, key actors in RaaS include the operator who develops and maintains ransomware payloads and payment portals to communicate with victims; access brokers that compromise networks and sell RaaS affiliates access to it; and RaaS affiliates who run the ransomware attack, steal data, move laterally on compromise networks and persist on systems.</p> <p>Ransomware really becomes dangerous at the "hands-on-keyboard phase". "When the attack reaches the active attack stage of deleting backups or shadow copies, the attack would be minutes away from ransomware deployment," Microsoft notes.</p> <p>By this stage, the attacker has likely exfiltrated data and would require defenders to prioritize the investigation of alerts or detections of tools like Cobalt Strike and quickly launching incident response (IR) procedures to contain a human adversary before they can deploy ransomware.</p> <p>Others actors in this economy might handle the leak site to share snippets of data stolen from victims. Other extortion services include leak site hosting, decryption negotiation, payment processing, and cryptocurrency transaction services.</p>

Microsoft estimates that where an access broker has compromised 2,500 potential victims, about 60 victims encounter activity associated with known ransomware attackers. Around 20 of these victims are successfully compromised, and then one of these organizations sees an actual ransomware payload deployed on their network.

The scale of attacks taken on by any group can vary, Microsoft said. Some activity groups can access thousands of potential targets and work through these as their staffing allows, prioritizing based on potential ransom payment over several months. Others prefer to attack smaller companies for less overall ransom because they can execute the attack within hours or days. Ransoms of tens of millions of dollars receive much attention but take much longer to develop, so many groups prefer to ransom five to 10 smaller targets in a month "because the success rate at receiving payment is higher in these targets", Microsoft said.

Microsoft rates Trickbot, which it has been tracking as DEV-0193 since October 2020, as "the most prolific" ransomware group today. It is responsible for developing, distributing and maintaining the Trickbot, Bazalloader, and AnchorDNS payloads. The group also managed the Ryuk RaaS program before its shutdown in June 2021, as well as Ryuk's believed successor, [Conti](#). DEV-0193 has also hired developers from Emotet, Qakbot, and IcedID, according to Microsoft.

Microsoft's report also covers [ELBRUS, also known as FIN7](#), which uses point-of-sale (PoS) and ATM malware to harvest payment card information. In 2020, it deployed MAZE and REvil RaaS, but then developed DarkSide as their own RaaS ecosystem, which it then retired in May 2021 and replaced with BlackMatter in July, only to retire it in November.

"The tendency to report on ransomware incidents based on payload and attribute it to a monolithic gang often obfuscates the true relationship between the attackers, which is very accurate of the DarkSide RaaS," Microsoft notes.

While Microsoft hasn't seen ELBRUS running a RaaS program today, it says it's still "very active in compromising organizations via phishing campaigns" that lead to their JSSLoader and Griffon malware. Microsoft has also seen the group exploiting CVE-2021-31207 in Exchange – a low-privilege ProxyShell bug – to elevate to high SYSTEM-level privileges in victim organizations in April 2022.

The [BlackCat ransomware gang](#) is another notable RaaS affiliate actor. It appeared in November 2021 and was created by 'access brokers' that previously sold access to multiple RaaS groups, including BlackMatter, [according to Cisco's Talos researchers](#).

The group Microsoft tracks as DEV-0504 currently deploys BlackCat, but previously deployed Ryuk, Revil, Lockbit 2.0, BlackMatter, and Conti. When one RaaS program shuts down, it moves to another, Microsoft notes.

While most of these RaaS groups are believed to operate from Russia, Microsoft highlights DEV-0401 as a unique "[China-based](#) lone wolf turned LockBit 2.0 affiliate" that recently started targeting the CVE-2021-44228 vulnerability in Log4j 2 in VMWare Horizon.

"Because DEV-0401 maintains and frequently rebrands their own ransomware payloads, they can appear as different groups in payload-driven reporting and evade detections and actions against them," Microsoft notes.

Microsoft's top advice for organizations to is to protect credentials.

"More than malware, attackers need credentials to succeed in their attacks. In almost all attacks where ransomware deployment was successful, the attackers had access to a domain admin-level account or local administrator passwords that were consistent throughout the environment," Microsoft says.

	<p>Attackers can deploy ransomware through Group Policy or tools like PsExec (or clones like PAExec, CSExec, and WinExeSvc), but spreading ransomware to multiple systems is much harder without the credentials that provide administrative access in a network.</p> <p>"Compromised credentials are so important to these attacks that when cybercriminals sell ill-gotten access to a network, in many instances, the price includes a guaranteed administrator account to start with," says Microsoft.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Leak: 21M VPN users' personal data
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/personal-details-supervpn-geckovpn-users-telegram-leaked/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>In total, the database contains 10GB worth of data from companies like SuperVPN, GeckoVPN, and ChatVPN which is now available for free download on several different Telegram groups.</p> <p>On May 7th, 2022, a database containing the personal details and login credentials of 21 million users was leaked in a Telegram group, Hackread.com has learned. What's noteworthy is that the dump also exposed the data of VPN users including popular VPNs like SuperVPN, GeckoVPN, and ChatVPN.</p> <p>The database was previously put up for sale on the Dark Web last year, but currently, it is available on Telegram for free.</p> <p>Database Exposed 10GB of Data According to researchers at VPNMentor, the leaked records comprised 10GB of data and exposed 21 million unique records. The information included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full names • Usernames • Country names • Billing details • Email addresses • Randomly generated password strings • Premium status and validity period <p>Further probe indicated that the leaked passwords were random, hashed, or salted without collision, therefore each was different and much more difficult to crack. A majority of the email IDs, about 99.5%, were Gmail accounts. But, researchers at vpnMentor believe that the dumped data is only a subset of the full dump.</p> <p>Possible Dangers The primary reason people choose to use VPNs is to ensure anonymity and privacy. This is why exposing the data of VPN users has far-reaching consequences since it is considered more valuable. In this case, the people who got their data exposed in the breach might become victims of blackmail, phishing scams, or identity theft since their full names and emails are leaked.</p> <p>They may also launch targeted scams because of the exposure of personally identifiable information like country name, billing details, usernames, etc. After cracking the passwords, threat actors can easily hijack their accounts and exploit their premium status.</p> <p>If the data lands in the hands of a tyrannical government, where VPN use is banned, this leak can lead to the arrest and detention of VPN users. If you want to stay protected from getting exploited by hackers/scammers, change your VPN account password and use a mix of upper-lower-case letters, symbols, numbers, etc., for optimum account security.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 APT34 targets Jordan government
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SOURCE	https://blog.malwarebytes.com/threat-intelligence/2022/05/apt34-targets-jordan-government-using-new-saitama-backdoor/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>On April 26th, we identified a suspicious email that targeted a government official from Jordan's foreign ministry. The email contained a malicious Excel document that drops a new backdoor named <i>Saitama</i>. Following our investigation, we were able to attribute this attack to the known Iranian Actor APT34.</p> <p>Also known as OilRig/COBALT GYPSY/IRN2/HELIX KITTEN, APT34 is an Iranian threat group that has targeted Middle Eastern countries and victims worldwide since at least 2014. The group is known to focus on the financial, governmental, energy, chemical, and telecommunication sectors.</p> <p>In this blog post, we describe the attack flow and share details about the Saitama backdoor.</p> <p>Malicious email file The malicious email was sent to the victim via a Microsoft Outlook account with the subject "Confirmation Receive Document" with an Excel file called "Confirmation Receive Document.xls". The sender pretends to be a person from the Government of Jordan by using its coat of arms as a signature.</p> <p>Excel document The Excel attachment contains a macro that performs malicious activities. The document has an image that tries to convince the victim to enable a macro....After enabling the macro, the image is replaced with the Jordan government's the coat of the arms...</p> <p>Saitama Backdoor – A finite state machine The dropped payload is a small backdoor that is written in .Net. It has the following interesting pdb path: E:\Saitama\Saitama.Agent\obj\Release\Saitama.Agent.pdb.</p> <p>Saitama backdoor abuses the DNS protocol for its command and control communications. This is stealthier than other communication methods, such as HTTP. Also, the actor cleverly uses techniques such as compression and long random sleep times. They employed these tricks to disguise malicious traffic in between legitimate traffic.</p> <p>Attribution There are several indicators that suggest that this campaign has been operated by APT34.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maldoc similarity: The maldoc used in this campaign shared some similarities with maldocs used in previous campaigns of this actor. More specifically similar to what was mentioned in CheckPoint's report this maldoc registers a scheduled task that would launch the executable every X minutes, also it uses the same anti sandboxing technique (checking if there is a mouse connected to the PC or not). Finally, we see a similar pattern to beacon back to the attacker server and inform the attacker about the current stage of execution. • Victims similarity: The group is known to target the government of Jordan and this is the case in this campaign. • Payload similarity: DNS is the most common method used by APT34 for its C&C communications. The group is also known to use uncommon encodings such as Base32 and Base36 in its previous campaigns. The Saitama backdoor uses a similar Base32 encoding for sending data to the servers that is used by DNSpionage. Also, to build subdomains it uses Base32 encoding that is similar to what was reported by Mandiant.
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HEADLINE	05/09 War in Ukraine and its impact on hackers
SOURCE	https://www.binarydefense.com/war-in-ukraine-and-its-impact-on-hackers/
GIST	The Russian invasion of Ukraine started on February 24th, and no one was left indifferent. Cybercriminals are divided into two camps: those who support an independent and free Ukraine with a right to self-determination and those who defend Russia's so-called security aims. Binary Defense experts have observed people on social media and dark web forums reacting to the incident.

The invasion was immediately denounced by Raid Forums, an English-speaking hacker forum. BHF forum expressed its position by adding “no war” to the forum’s title. A moderator of XSS, the biggest Russian-speaking dark forum, announced that they would ban any conversation about the war in Ukraine. “We support peace,” added the moderator. Despite attempts to silence pro-war individuals on XSS, forum members continue to discuss the conflict.

Conflict Has Affected Many Hackers Personally

The cybercrime group behind the Raccoon Stealer (password-stealing software) has halted operations after claiming that one of its developers died in the war.

“Dear Clients, unfortunately, due to the “special operation,” we will have to close our project Raccoon Stealer. The members of our team who are responsible for critical moments in the operation of the product are no longer with us. We are disappointed to close our project; further stable operation of the stealer is physically impossible,” added the group member.

Some hackers express their position using words like “Everything will be Ukraine” or “Stop War” in their titles or comments. One user asked the community on the popular dark web to help Ukrainian refugees temporarily relocate to one of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) counties.

“The country received a large number of refugees from Ukraine; the situation there is difficult. Money will go to a third party, not to the Russian Federation or Ukraine! Money will be used to help children only! In our plans to purchase children’s LEGO-type constructors, shampoos, soaps, and household needs specifically for people living in refugee camps, mainly for children and mothers! I ask you to refrain from political and military comments,” pointed out the author.

Anonymous Declared a Cyberwar on Russia

Anonymous, a collective hacking group, has made a public declaration of war. On February 24, the hacking organization @YourAnonOne, linked to Anonymous, claimed that it was targeting Vladimir Putin’s regime.

“The Anonymous collective is officially in cyberwar against the Russian government,” was posted by the hacking group on Twitter.

After that, the organization has claimed responsibility for several cyber incidents, including Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, which have shut down banks, government websites like the Kremlin and Ministry of Defense, as well as the state-run news agencies Russia Today and RT news. Anonymous also claimed to have hacked Russian official television networks, broadcasting pro-Ukraine content like patriotic songs and photographs from the attack.

The Russian Ministry of Emergencies’ website was hacked. On the home page appeared the hyperlink with the words: “Don’t trust the Russian media – they are lying”, “Full information about the war in Ukraine,” and “Russia’s default is imminent”.

Anonymous and its affiliates also breached many databases of Russian companies, organizations, and state entities, such as:

- The Ministry of Defense
- The Ministry of Economic Development
- Gazprom, a majority state-owned multinational energy corporation
- Roskomnadzor, the federal executive agency responsible for monitoring, controlling and censoring
- Rosneft, Russia’s oil giant
- Rosatom, Russia’s nuclear energy operator
- Central Bank of Russia
- The Ministry of Culture
- Technotec, oil and gas field services provider to Rosneft and Gazprom Neft
- Russian Orthodox Church

- Aerogas, a company that specializes in the oil and gas industry
- MashOil, a company that designs, manufactures, and maintains drilling, mining, and fracking equipment
- Marathon Group, an investment firm owned by oligarch Alexander Vinokurov, who is currently under EU sanctions. Vinokurov is the son-in-law of Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister
- Thozis Corp., a Russian investment firm owned by Zakhar Smushkin, a Russian oligarch
- Gazregion, a construction company specializing in gas pipelines and facilities
- Elektrocentromontazh (ECM), Russia's leading electricity organization
- ALET, a Russian customs broker for gasoline and energy

Recently, on May 1, the Anonymous-affiliated organization NB65 breached a massive cache of files from Qiwi, a Russian corporation that provides payment and financial services in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Every week, Anonymous and its affiliates release new Russian-based databases and have promised to continue to do so until the war is over.

From The Other Side

The XakNet Team, the Russian hacking group, was created in an attempt to balance the sides in Anonymous' cyberwar against Russia. It claimed responsibility for stealing business correspondence from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry system. The illegally obtained information was leaked to Mash, a Russian news organization, and it has already published part of it. Hundreds of thousands of letters – diplomatic notes, notifications, and claims were provided by hackers.

The XakNet Team teamed up with Killnet, a pro-Russian hacker organization that has claimed to have shut down websites in Ukraine as well as other websites in countries friendly to Ukraine. On April 29, they launched Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks on websites managed by the Romanian government. The gang has previously launched DDoS attacks against websites in the United States, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, and Poland, all with the goal of stopping the supply of military weapons and equipment to Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	05/10 OR election web hosting provider hacked
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/northwest/hackers-hit-web-hosting-provider-linked-to-oregon-elections/
GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. (AP) — A week before Oregon's primary election, the secretary of state's office is moving to protect the integrity of its online system where campaign finance records are published after a web hosting provider was hit by a ransomware attack.</p> <p>Secretary of State Shemia Fagan's office said people inputting records into the ORESTAR state campaign finance reporting system may have been affected, and have been sent detailed instructions on how to proceed.</p> <p>"The Oregon Secretary of State has not been hacked," Fagan's office reassured voters in a statement late Monday. "No sensitive data on our systems has been exposed. No systems related to elections administration have been compromised."</p> <p>By Tuesday, one-tenth of registered voters had already cast their ballots for the May 17 primary election. Oregonians vote by mail or by using official drop-off boxes.</p> <p>The Oregon Elections Division said it learned on Monday that Opus Interactive — a web hosting provider used by the campaign finance firm C&E Systems — was the victim of a ransomware attack.</p> <p>"C&E's database was compromised, which includes their client's log-in credentials for ORESTAR accounts," Fagan's statement said. The Secretary of State's office said it is requiring all 1,100 affected users to reset their passwords.</p>

But Jef Green, owner of C&E Systems, gave a lower number of affected users, saying only about 300 clients are political committees involved in the 2022 midterm elections in Oregon.

“At least 500 of the committees don’t exist anymore,” Green said. His company offers help with all aspects of campaign compliance and reporting, and indicated the ransomware attack is more of an annoyance than anything.

“This isn’t going to affect any of our clients as far as the reporting (of campaign spending and contributions). None of the candidates are going to be affected by this because, even though we don’t have access to our fancy database to make it easy for us, we can still do everything that needs to be done manually,” he said.

While candidates for state and local elections use ORESTAR, candidates for national office like Congress use a different system.

Opus Interactive’s website was down Tuesday morning. A person who answered the phone at the company said he couldn’t comment on the ransomware attack.

An online “status page” about the issue from the Portland company said “Opus Interactive and certain Opus-hosted customer virtual servers and backups were hit by a ransomware attack which encrypted the server disk files.” It added industry-leading cybersecurity and digital forensics experts have been engaged to assist in the company’s response.

Fagan’s office said it works with the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center and the FBI year-round to ensure the integrity of its systems.

As of Tuesday morning, 288,337 completed ballots have been returned out of a total of just over 2.9 million registered voters, according to unofficial ballot counts from the secretary of state.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	05/10 Lithuania declares Russia terrorist country
SOURCE	https://www.npr.org/2022/05/10/1097911440/lithuania-russia-terrorism-genocide-ukraine
GIST	<p>Lithuania's parliament has designated Russia a terrorist country and its actions in Ukraine as genocide. The Lithuanian Seimas tweeted Tuesday that its members had passed the resolution unanimously.</p> <p>This makes Lithuania the first country to declare Russia a perpetrator of terrorism, according to Ukraine's Centre for Strategic Communications and Information Security. It's not the first to formally accuse Russia of genocide: Canadian lawmakers unanimously adopted such a motion last month.</p> <p>Lithuania's resolution says that Russia's armed forces and mercenaries have committed war crimes in Ukraine, citing the atrocities reported in places Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, Borodyaka, Hostomel and other cities, according to public broadcaster Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT).</p> <p>"The Russian Federation, whose military forces deliberately and systematically target civilian targets, is a state that supports and perpetrates terrorism," the resolution reads.</p> <p>It also recognizes "the full-scale armed aggression — war — against Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation and its political and military leadership [...] as genocide against the Ukrainian people."</p>

LRT says the resolution describes Russia's intent as destroying Ukraine and breaking its spirit by "killing entire families, including children, abducting and raping people, and mocking them and the bodies of the murdered."

Lawmakers are calling for Russia to be held accountable for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. They are advocating for the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate Russia's actions, and want it to have the power to issue international arrest warrants.

Ukrainian officials are praising Lithuania's resolution. Ruslan Stefanchuk, chairman of Ukraine's parliament, [described it](#) as "historic" in posts on social media.

"I urge the whole world to pick up the baton so that the memory of the mass murders of Ukrainians has never been erased by the enemy!" [he said](#).

Still, the declaration is not without risks. It could worsen the former Soviet republic's increasingly [tense relationship with Russia](#), as one expert noted on Tuesday.

Samuel Ramani, a geopolitical analyst and associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London, [tweeted that](#) Lithuania's moves were provoking "harsh reactions in Moscow," with one Russian legislator warning that Russia could completely cut off economic ties with the country.

Lithuania, which is a member of NATO, has taken other concrete steps to distance itself from Russia since the start of its war in Ukraine. In April, it became the first European Union nation to [stop Russian gas imports](#).

And, most recently, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis called for regime change in Russia in a Monday interview with the [Associated Press](#): "As long as a regime that intends to wage wars outside Russian territory is in place, the countries surrounding it are in danger."

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HEADLINE	05/11 ISWAP kills commander for surrender plan
SOURCE	https://politicsnigeria.com/breaking-iswap-kills-shekaus-deputy-for-planning-to-surrender/
GIST	<p>Terrorists of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter of Boko Haram, have reportedly killed one of its top Commanders, Abu-Sadiq popularly known as Burbur, over his alleged plans to surrender to government forces.</p> <p>POLITICS NIGERIA learned that Burbur was eliminated in Galta village, close to Madagali in Adamawa State, after he was charged and 'found guilty' of 'treasonable felony' by a purported court presided over by Ya-Shaik, an ISWAP Fiye (Militant Chief), of Sambisa forest.</p> <p>Bubur was held in an ISWAP prison in the major part of last month. He was eventually eliminated on the May 9.</p> <p>Before his death, Burbur's last appointment was Deputy Militant Chief (Nai'b), in Charge of Sambisa Forest and Timbuktu Triangle.</p> <p>The appointment was made in May 2021 when he paid allegiance to ISWAP, because of his deep knowledge of the terrain and his strategic former appointment as the Operation Commander and Aide-de-Camp to late Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Indonesia: 5 linked to funding IS efforts
SOURCE	https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/indonesian/terror-financing-05102022150556.html

Five Indonesian nationals who had their assets frozen by the United States are suspected of being involved in financing the Islamic State militant group's efforts to recruit teens to fight in Syria and other countries, Indonesia's counter-terrorism agency confirmed Tuesday.

Two of the suspects are in Indonesia while the other three are at Camp al-Hol in Syria near the Turkish border, the BNPT agency said. On Monday, the [U.S. Treasury Department](#) named five Indonesian suspects, saying the United States had frozen their U.S. assets and was prohibiting people from engaging in certain transactions with them.

"The five individuals ... have played a key role in facilitating the travel of extremists to Syria and other areas where ISIS operates," the U.S. Treasury Department said in a news release, using a different acronym for Islamic State (IS).

The Treasury identified the five as Dwi Dahlia Susanti, Rudi Heryadi, Ari Kardian, Muhammad Dandi Adhiguna and Dini Ramadhani.

"By designating them, we aim to expose and disrupt an international ISIS facilitation network that has financed ISIS recruitment, including of vulnerable children in Syria," U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a separate statement.

In Jakarta, Brig. Gen. Ahmad Nurwahid, the BNPT's director of prevention, confirmed that the five were foreign terrorist fighters, the term for Indonesians who join militant groups abroad. Nurwahid declined to disclose how much money the five had allegedly raised to support the IS.

"We can't reveal the figures because it's part of the investigation," Nurwahid told BenarNews. "Furthermore, the government, in this case, BNPT, will follow up in accordance with the existing authorities and powers based on the law."

The U.S. government identified Susanti as an IS financial facilitator since at least 2017, saying she assisted members of the militant group with money transfers involving individuals in Indonesia, Turkey, and Syria. It said Susanti had helped her unnamed husband deliver nearly U.S. \$4,000 and weapons to an IS leader in 2017.

As of early 2021, Susanti has facilitated money transfers from Indonesia to Syria to provide funds to some people in displaced persons camps, according to the Treasury. In some cases, it said, these funds were used to smuggle teens out of the camps to the desert where IS foreign fighters received them.

Susanti, Ramadhani and Adhiguna are at the al-Hol camp on Syria's border with Turkey, according to BNPT.

Densus 88

Heryadi was deported from Turkey on Sept. 27, 2019, and had been sentenced to three years and six months before being released on parole on Monday, the same day the U.S. announced its sanctions, according to BNPT. Kardian, who was arrested in 2016 on charges linked to efforts to assist Indonesians traveling to Syria to join IS, has been released from custody as well.

Gen. Dedi Prasetyo, the spokesman for the Indonesian national police, said the counter-terrorism unit Densus 88 had been monitoring the suspects.

"We will be in contact with the NCB-Interpol to find those who are allegedly abroad, as well as with the Interpol in the countries where they are allegedly located," Dedi told BenarNews, referring to the National Central Bureau, which links police to the global Interpol network.

Al Chaidar Abdurrahman Puteh, a terrorism analyst at Malikussaleh University, confirmed the allegations. "Dini Ramadhani and Dwi Dahlia Susanti were in and out of Turkey and Syria to take ISIS children from the Deir Al-Azur and al-Hol camps," Al Chaidar told BenarNews.

	<p>Meanwhile, Dyah Ayu Kartika, an analyst with the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), said the U.S. government had issued statements that essentially barred its citizens from carrying out transactions with those aiding the IS and other militant groups.</p> <p>“For individuals, it’s actually quite rare, so we are still investigating these five names,” Dyah told BenarNews.</p> <p>She noted that the World Human Care, an NGO formed by the Indonesian Mujahidin Council, was sanctioned in February 2021 for allegedly funding militants in Syria under the guise of humanitarian aid. Luki Abdul Hayyi, secretary general of the NGO, rejected the U.S. allegations.</p> <p>In a recent report, IPAC said many Indonesians on global terrorism lists, in particular the U.S. Treasury list, automatically get that designation from the United Nations. Still, the lists are perpetually out of date, leaving out some of the most notorious terrorists while including people who were never involved in violence.</p> <p>“This may be in part because of the bureaucratic procedures involved in placing new names on the list (let alone removing old ones), but also because enforcing sanctions against those listed could complicate government efforts at rehabilitation and reintegration,” the report said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Desertions weaken ISWAP, Boko Haram
SOURCE	https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/desertions-weaken-iswap-boko-haram/
GIST	<p>As the bloody rivalry between two large terror groups continues to destroy countless lives in northeast Nigeria, both sides are experiencing another kind of loss — desertions. In recent months, thousands of fighters from Boko Haram and its rival splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have surrendered to local authorities, weakening the two groups.</p> <p>A report released during an April 7 briefing by the United Nations Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee analyzed the deaths of terrorist leaders that preceded the current wave of defections.</p> <p>“The relatively recent deaths of Abu Musab al-Barnawi of ISWAP, Abubakar Shekau of Boko Haram, and Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi of ISGS [Islamic State in the Greater Sahara], and the desertion of thousands of individuals from the groups’ ranks signaled a possible weakening of ISIS-affiliated groups in parts of Africa,” the report stated.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of civilians have been killed by extremist groups, and hundreds of thousands have fled the Lake Chad region since ISWAP broke off from Boko Haram in 2016.</p> <p>Rear Admiral Yaminu Musa, coordinator of Nigeria’s Counter-Terrorism Centre, gave credit to the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which is composed of troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.</p> <p>“The MNJTF military response has greatly benefited by the flow of information from the regional intelligence units with the support of the United States, France and the United Kingdom,” Musa said during the briefing.</p> <p>Nigerian forces found recent success after deploying 12 U.S.-made Super Tucano light strike aircraft, which patrol the northeast, gather intelligence and attack Boko Haram and ISWAP camps that previously were too remote to find.</p> <p>“Now combatants alongside their families have been compelled to lay down their arms,” Musa said. “They are coming out of their enclaves.”</p>

Officials anticipated a shift in power between the rival factions after Shekau's death in May 2021. The longtime Boko Haram leader detonated his suicide vest to avoid being captured in ISWAP's invasion of Boko Haram's Sambisa Forest stronghold in Borno State.

In October, Nigeria's top military commander confirmed that Al-Barnawi had been killed. His death forced ISWAP to regroup as well.

"In recent months, there has been an endless mass surrender of terrorists and their sympathizers in the northeastern part of Nigeria," Nigerian National Security Advisor Gen. Babagana Monguno said during the Paris Peace Forum in late 2021. "Currently, over 15,000 people have been received.

"This situation has prompted large-scale humanitarian activities to rehabilitate the returnees by expanding the already existing Operation Safe Corridor for deradicalization and subsequent reintegration into society."

The Nigerian military reported that 51 114 rebels and families — 11 398 men, 15 381 women, and 24 335 children — had surrendered as of 5 April.

In claiming territory from Boko Haram in the northeast, ISWAP has begun collecting taxes, providing government services and protection from bandits who routinely torment remote villages.

The Nigerian government is encouraging militants to consider reintegration programs as an alternative to violence.

That aligns with the U.N. study, which calls for "transitional justice approaches (including criminal justice) and prevention mechanisms to enhance states' resilience, strengthened pathways out of conflict, and included robust steps towards preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pledged to support Nigeria's reintegration efforts when he visited the Borno capital, Maiduguri, on May 3 and saw a camp that houses fighters who have surrendered.

"The governor has told me that you need to create new facilities to be able to have effective reintegration of these ex-terrorists, ex-combatants, and I promised that we would be fully supportive of that project," Guterres later said during a news conference.

"The best thing we can do for peace is to reintegrate those who in the moment of despair became terrorists but now want to become citizens and to contribute to the well-being of their brothers and sisters."

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HEADLINE	05/10 Former Gitmo-prisoner on trial in France
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/10/saber-lahmar-former-quantanamo-prisoner-trial-france
GIST	<p>An Algerian preacher who spent eight years in the US-run Guantánamo Bay prison has gone on trial in France for allegedly encouraging several young men to join the Islamic State group.</p> <p>Saber Lahmar, a 52-year-old Algerian released by the US in 2008 and taken in afterwards by France, has been charged with encouraging jihadists to head to Iraq and Syria to fight for the extremist group in 2015.</p> <p>Speaking mostly in Arabic at the start of his trial in Paris on Tuesday, Lahmar denied having links to Islamist groups in France and suggested he was being persecuted because of his religion.</p> <p>"Today I am being detained because I knew someone who left for Syria," he said, referring to Salim Machou, a Frenchman who was sentenced to death in an Iraqi court for belonging to IS in 2019.</p> <p>"But he can go where he likes, on the moon or on Earth, that's none of my business. I am not responsible for anyone, only for myself ... I am not the guide of this or that person," Lahmar added.</p>

	<p>French prosecutors believe Lahmar, a former Arab language professor, acted as a spiritual guide to Machou and another IS recruit, Othman Yekhllef, who is presumed dead in Syria.</p> <p>The trial, which runs until the end of the week, is expected to hear evidence of his radical preaching which allegedly included antisemitic rants and calls for martyrdom and killing apostates.</p> <p>Lahmar was one of hundreds of people swept up into the legal black hole of the US-run military prison in Guantánamo Bay in Cuba after the 11 September 2001 terror attacks.</p> <p>He was handed over to US authorities in Bosnia, along with five other Algerians suspected of preparing an attack against the US embassy in Sarajevo, but was denied the chance to defend himself. He was taken in by France after being released by the US, even though he had no family in the country, the French foreign ministry said at the time.</p> <p>In media interviews since, he described living “like an animal” in the US prison camp and said he did not see the sun for a year-and-a-half during his extreme solitary confinement.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 NCTC chief: top terror threats
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/top-terror-threats-counterterrorism-chief-christy-abizaid-intelligence-matters/
GIST	<p>In this episode of <i>Intelligence Matters</i>, host Michael Morell speaks with Christine "Christy" Abizaid, director of the National Counterterrorism Center within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Abizaid explains how the center's mission has evolved in the two decades following 9/11 and where its current areas of focus are. She details the existing external attack capabilities of terror networks including ISIS, al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab and explains how their ideologies have spread worldwide. Abizaid also offers her perspective on the threat within the U.S. of domestic violent extremists, explaining how NCTC supports domestic law enforcement agencies in tracking and disrupting potential attacks.</p> <p>HIGHLIGHTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ON NCTC'S MISSION: "We exist as the government's knowledge base on terrorism. We have the authoritative database on known and suspected terrorists. We have a strategic operational planning function. We are unique across government in the authorities we have, the data we have, the collaboration across an interagency environment that exists at NCTC, and that is all to serve the protection of the United States of America. Our primary role is to connect the dots, to live in the seams and to look across the information that we have to be able to discern when a threat is coming our way. And so transnational linkages, searching for transnational linkages, figuring out ways to disrupt those transnational linkages - that's our bread and butter." • THE MOST LIKELY ATTACK SCENARIO IN U.S. OR EUROPE: "[W]hen I look at the most likely way in which a terrorist attack will happen here in the homeland or in parts of Europe, it is an individual, motivated, using crude weapons, easily accessed, including a vehicle that they might drive on a regular basis. And it's without many of the signatures that have allowed us to protect against the centrally directed networked threat for so many years." • TRACKING THE TERROR THREAT IN AFGHANISTAN: "Afghanistan is harder than when we had troops on the ground, FOBs all over the country, and were able to target threats as soon as we saw them. It is a harder operating environment, no doubt. But that doesn't mean that we aren't going to be effective as a counterterrorism community in, one, understanding the threats that might be developing there; two, kind of building a CT architecture not just in Afghanistan, but around Afghanistan, to protect against that and using all the best tools at our disposal to disrupt the facilitation routes, understand where the money is going, discern what plots are actually forming to be credible and must demand that we take action. And so I'm confident in our counterterrorism community. I'm confident and the focus that we have there. And yes, it's a hard target, but we were built for those." • THREAT FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM: "We've had 45 foreign terrorist attacks inside the homeland since 9/11 over the last 21 years. In half that time, since 2010, we've had the same number of attacks from what we term as domestic violent extremists. And most of

	those attacks, which are highly lethal, the majority of them and the majority of the deaths are perpetrated by a racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists... And so we from the national counterterrorism community are really focused on doing our part within the scope of our authorities to support the FBI, to support DHS, as we try and get ahead of and protect against that version of the terrorist threat that is presented to Americans."
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	05/11 National Third Shift Workers Day
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2022/05/11/National-Third-Shift-Workers-Day-Jeff-Corbett/8931652217186/
GIST	<p>May 11 (UPI) -- National Third Shift Workers Day, celebrated annually on the second Wednesday in May, was founded to pay tribute to people working overnight jobs.</p> <p>The holiday was founded by North Carolina man Jeff Corbett, who wanted a day set aside to appreciate the workers who put in their time while most other people are asleep.</p> <p>National Third Shift Workers Day coincides with National Night Shift Workers Day, which is also marked on the second Wednesday in May and was founded separately Velcea Kay.</p> <p>Other holidays and observances for May 11 include Eat What you Want Day, Hostess Cupcake Day, National Foam Rolling Day, National Receptionists Day, National Root Canal Appreciation Day, National School Nurse Day, National Twilight Zone Day and World Ego Awareness Day.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Colorado snowpack melting ridiculous rate
SOURCE	https://www.union-bulletin.com/news/national/colorado-s-snowpack-is-melting-at-a-ridiculous-rate/article_793d2289-47ac-585f-82e4-8f0a750f71fa.html
GIST	<p>Colorado didn't see enough snow this winter to fully recover from the ongoing megadrought and now what snow the state did see is melting too quickly, experts say.</p> <p>"If we continue on at the rate we're at we're looking at probably a complete meltout by the end of May or beginning of June," Becky Bollinger, of the Colorado Climate Center, told The Denver Post.</p> <p>That's too soon. By several weeks, she said. So drought conditions are likely to worsen, exacerbating what officials are anticipating could be the worst wildfire year in Colorado's history.</p> <p>Already fire restrictions appear to be more common than normal. And experts have questioned whether Colorado is prepared for another devastating wildfire like the Marshall Fire, which burned through a record number of homes and businesses in December.</p> <p>As an example of the melt out, Bollinger pointed to the San Juan Mountains in the southwest corner of the state. The snow there has been melting at a "ridiculous" rate, she said.</p> <p>"They should still have about 8.5 inches of snowpack," Bollinger said. "And they're at 2 (inches)."</p> <p>Mountains in northern Colorado are faring a little better, Bollinger said, but ultimately the earlier melt out means that water will be absorbed quickly by the parched soils or evaporated. More drawn-out melt outs, which usually last until mid-June, stretch the water supply more efficiently, recharging the state's dry waterways and plant life.</p>

	<p>Windy and sunny conditions in April, combined with low humidity levels led to high levels of evapotranspiration, Russ Schumacher, director of the Colorado Climate Center, told a group of climatologists Tuesday morning. That amounts to a “thirsty atmosphere,” which forces surface water to evaporate further.</p> <p>As snow melts, some of the state’s waterways — like the Colorado, Gunnison, Rio Grande and San Juan rivers — might see a short-lived uptick but ultimately below-average flows in water, Bollinger said. The severity of those conditions will depend on whether Colorado sees more colder temperatures and additional snow in the coming weeks.</p> <p>“And neither of those are on the horizon,” Bollinger said.</p> <p>The melt out also comes on the heels of an extremely dry April, which set records along much of the Eastern Plains, Zach Schwalbe, manager of the Colorado Agricultural Meteorological Network, said in the group climatologist discussion.</p> <p>Not only does the lack of moisture and early melt out increase the risk for wildfires across the state but it also cuts into Colorado’s \$47 billion agricultural industry.</p> <p>Looking at current trends Bollinger anticipated that the state’s drought conditions will only worsen heading into the summer.</p> <p>“I hope that I am wrong but that is my expectation,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 Ticks spreading in US with new diseases
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/ticks-are-spreading-in-the-us-and-taking-new-diseases-with-them/
GIST	<p>A DISEASE THAT is so rare in the United States that it is recognized in only about 40 people each year has taken the life of a person living in Maine. The cause, Powassan virus, is transmitted by ticks, which can pass it on within 15 minutes of biting. The virus causes neurological damage; one out of every 10 people who develop severe symptoms die of brain inflammation, and about half of those who recover experience long-term problems with memory, balance, and speech.</p> <p>One death is always a tragedy, but one death in a country of hundreds of millions can feel like no more than a statistical blip. But to tick experts, the person in Maine—who hasn’t been identified or described—is a warning. Other than Lyme disease, tick-borne diseases are little known to the public and under-recognized by health care. That’s a problem, because research shows tick species are expanding into new areas and carrying greater amounts of pathogens as they move. And it’s especially a problem because the US has not set up a nationwide monitoring system that could identify where tick species exist, how they are traveling, and what diseases they carry.</p> <p>The country depends instead on a patchwork of local detection efforts that rise and ebb as public health funding changes. And in an echo of the Covid pandemic, the US relies on individuals to take actions to keep themselves safe, even though political jurisdictions take on the task of preventing similar diseases such as ones caused by mosquitoes.</p> <p>“We have no national tick-monitoring network set up, though people have been quietly screaming for one for years,” says Richard Ostfeld, a disease ecologist, tick expert, and senior scientist at the independent Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies in New York state. “If you’re monitoring the ticks, you’re monitoring the pathogens. And if you know where the ticks and tick-borne pathogens are, you can do a decent job of predicting where they will be soon and get out in front with campaigns of education and awareness.”</p> <p>This is complex, because ticks are complex. The tiny arachnids are technically parasites, because they survive only by taking sips of blood from reptiles, birds, and mammals—including us. They have complicated life cycles that involve three iterations of slurping up a meal, dropping off for a nap, and</p>

metamorphosing into a new form. Their species are regional—limited to specific areas, though those lines are blurring—which means the pathogens they carry are regionalized too.

But they account for abundant amounts of disease: [16 different illnesses](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which estimated in 2018 that the occurrence of illness caused by ticks and insects [tripled](#) between 2004 and 2016. Ticks accounted for at least 75 percent of that rise.

“Tick-borne diseases are the most important vector-borne disease in the continental US when you tally the amount of disease transmitted to humans,” says Gonzalo Vazquez-Prokopec, a disease ecologist and associate professor at the Emory College of Arts and Sciences. “And if you go back in time, 30 to 40 years, those diseases had not even been described.”

Scientists recognize that danger even though the statistics on tick-borne diseases are widely understood to be incomplete. Of those 16 illnesses, only six are “nationally notifiable,” meaning that state health departments are required to collect data on their occurrence and funnel it to the CDC. (Those would be Lyme disease; [Powassan](#); [babesiosis](#), a parasitic disease that’s been called “American malaria”; [anaplasmosis](#); spotted fever rickettsiosis, which used to be known as Rocky Mountain spotted fever; and tularemia, also known as rabbit fever.) In the agency’s [last count, in 2019](#), before Covid disrupted the data flow to its tick programs, there were 50,865 cases of those six diseases recorded in the US, ranging from 34,945 for Lyme to 43 for Powassan. To suggest how much of an undercount that is: CDC scientists have estimated, based on insurance data, that [more than 476,000](#) Americans are diagnosed and treated each year just for Lyme disease. That’s more than 13 times the reported number of cases.

For the unreported tick-borne diseases, “we don’t know exactly the extent of infection in humans,” says Saravanan Thangamani, a vector biologist and professor of microbiology and immunology at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, New York. “For two reasons: The reporting structure is not there, and it’s easy to misdiagnose. When you go to a doctor with an acute febrile illness, these days they will test you for Covid and they will test you for flu. But they will not think about, ‘Should I test for the viral illnesses in ticks in the United States?’ The awareness among clinicians is not there.”

Thangamani can make that assertion because his lab runs a citizen-science program, [TickMAP](#) (for “Mapping Arthropods and Pathogens”), that accepts ticks sent in by New York residents, analyzes the species of tick and any pathogens each tick is carrying, and geolocates the results. The analysis is free. “Every year we are seeing a progressive increase in the number of ticks we’re receiving; geographic expansion—from each county, we see more ticks coming; and pathogen prevalence in the ticks is increasing,” he says.

That migration isn’t only happening within New York state. For about a decade, researchers have documented that the major disease-carrying tick species are [on the move](#) throughout the US. This is unexpected, because ticks are picky; temperature, humidity, forest cover, soil moisture, and the presence of their preferred hosts all tend to keep them confined to particular areas. The obvious answer to why they might relocate is climate change. As temperature zones move northward, it’s reasonable to think the arachnids would follow.

But contrary to that expectation, some species are also expanding westward, and others are moving south.

“There’s no doubt that climate change is playing a role, but it is not the only driver of these changes in distribution,” Ostfeld says, naming as other contributors habitat fragmentation and loss of biodiversity, including changes in the mix of small and midsize mammals on land parcels. Other researchers have theorized that greater tree density along the East Coast has created friendly conditions, perhaps because it creates corridors for deer migration.

Whatever the reason, the result is a landscape in which it is easy for ticks and the pathogens they carry to settle into areas long before they are detected. “The worst-case scenario, which we keep reinventing over and over, is the Lyme disease scenario,” Ostfeld says, referring back to the recognition of that illness in kids, originally misidentified as juvenile arthritis, in Lyme, Connecticut, in the 1970s. “A tick-borne

disease arrives in a place abundantly for the first time where it has not occurred before or has been very sparse in the past, so there's very low awareness. Then suddenly people are being exposed at a much higher rate, so you have delayed detection, or even failed diagnosis."

Recent discoveries demonstrate that ticks are full of surprises. In 2009, CDC researchers went in search of the cause of unexplained illness—fever and neurological problems—in two farmers in northwestern Missouri. The team [not only discovered](#) that the cause was a previously unknown tick-borne pathogen, now known as Heartland virus, but while broadening the search to try to define how widely it was distributed, they also discovered a [second new tick-borne pathogen](#), Bourbon virus, which had killed a man in Kansas. As evidence of how such emerging diseases can spread under the radar, researchers at the CDC identified antibodies to the Heartland virus in [wildlife in 13 states](#) just six years later, and researchers from the University of Georgia found in 2018 that the virus had been in deer in Georgia [since 2001](#)—eight years before the first known human case. Reinforcing that, Vazquez-Prokopec and his lab [last month identified](#) the virus in ticks in Georgia, including in a county where a man died in 2005 and was retrospectively diagnosed with Heartland virus disease.

All those viral footprints in [wildlife](#) were uncovered by curious academics, and in the human cases by epidemiologists solving the puzzle of a serious illness. Which makes almost all of those discoveries lagging indicators, uncovered anywhere from months to decades after a tick-borne virus arrived in an area to put people at risk.

Last year, a group of researchers from five universities and the CDC [tried to quantify](#) the state of tick-borne disease surveillance in the US, looking at public health resources for sounding an alarm when ticks and their pathogens move. What they found was dismaying. Only around half of state and local public health agencies were cooperating with private or academic programs that conduct tick surveillance, and only 26 percent of agencies were either operating or helping fund programs that identify pathogens within ticks. Most were then not doing anything with that data. Only 23 percent of public health agencies were sending tick analysis information to local health departments, with only 14 percent reporting it on to the CDC—taking crucial data out of the national picture, and depriving health care personnel and residents of the areas they serve of the knowledge they need to protect themselves.

The underlying reason, the interviewees agreed, was funding, which was scant, inconsistent, or tied to a boom-bust cycle that launched with concern for local illnesses or deaths but dropped off after the alarm faded.

That patchwork of detection and reporting forces the responsibility for prevention back onto individuals, and investigators agree there is more the public could be doing. "My ultimate ask is that we have good uptake of public health messaging, to allow people to never get sick in the first place," says J. Erin Staples, a physician and epidemiologist at the CDC who led the original investigation into Heartland virus.

But the big goal, for researchers immersed in the problem of ticks, is building systems that can detect and predict problems before people are ever at risk—as soon as a tick arrives in a new area, carrying a pathogen never before seen in that place. Real-time risk mapping would require routinely trapping and analyzing ticks and their pathogens, not waiting for a human to develop an illness caused by an unexpected bite. Only a few jurisdictions—[Connecticut](#), [New York](#)—have invested in that so far, and that makes sense, because those are the states whose residents suffered the most at first from tick invasions.

But ticks are moving so randomly and so fast that nationwide data gathering, and data sharing via a comprehensive database, would be the smartest protective move right now. "In terms of actually coming up with an action plan, I think it's quite important to know: What are ticks doing?" Ostfeld says. "That kind of tick and pathogen surveillance gives us information we can't get any other way." That doesn't exist, but it could be built—and if that were to happen before another person dies from a disease they didn't know they were at risk from, it would not be too soon.

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HEADLINE

05/10 WA first to require electric heat new bldgs.

SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/environment/2022/05/washington-first-state-require-all-electric-heating-new-buildings
GIST	<p>Washington recently became the first state in the country to mandate that newly constructed buildings be outfitted with all-electric space heating and hot water systems.</p> <p>The State Building Code Council voted 11-3 on April 22 to adopt a revised energy code that requires most new commercial buildings and large multifamily buildings to install electric heat pumps. The council is expected to consider a similar proposal for smaller residential buildings later this year.</p> <p>Heat pumps are an extremely energy-efficient technology that can extract heat from the outside air, even on very cold days, and pump it inside to provide space heating. They can also run in reverse and provide cooling in the summer. The revised code also mandates the use of heat-pump hot water heaters.</p> <p>The news comes shortly after another high-profile effort to ban gas in new buildings in New York state was dropped during tense budget negotiations in early April.</p> <p>About 10% of U.S. carbon emissions come from burning fossil fuels like natural gas for heating and cooking. Many climate advocates want to see all buildings eventually transition to appliances that can be powered by clean electricity. But requiring homeowners to update existing buildings can be challenging and expensive. To start, advocates are pushing for legislation and code changes in cities, towns and state legislatures all over the country that prevent the expansion of natural gas use to <i>new</i> buildings.</p> <p>“We’ve got to stop digging the hole before it gets deeper,” said Jonny Kocher, a senior associate with RMI, a nonprofit clean energy advocacy organization. Kocher authored the building electrification code proposal that the Washington council adopted in late April.</p> <p>Dozens of towns and cities in California, Washington, Colorado and Oregon have already effectively banned gas in most new buildings. New York City did the same in December. At the state level, California also adopted a landmark building code change last August that strongly encourages new buildings to forgo gas hookups, but does not mandate it.</p> <p>At the same time, the gas industry is vigorously fighting these policies and asserting that it will be possible to cut emissions from buildings using lower-carbon fuels like gas from landfills and clean hydrogen. At least 19 Republican-led state legislatures have passed preemption laws that prevent municipalities from banning gas.</p> <p>In Washington, the revised code came in response to a target set by the state Legislature to reduce the amount of energy consumed by nonresidential buildings by 70% by 2031. A 2021 Washington state energy strategy report also found that electrification and energy efficiency were the most cost effective ways to achieve state greenhouse gas targets for buildings.</p> <p>While Washington is the first state with an all-electric mandate, the California Energy Commission, which oversees the state building code, passed a similar policy last August that will also go into effect in 2023. The California code sets a baseline efficiency standard that all but requires the use of heat pumps for space heating. Developers have the option to install other types of heating as long as they adopt a raft of energy efficiency measures. The California code is also more flexible in regards to water heating.</p> <p>Washington’s new code does contain a few exceptions for hospitals, research facilities and other buildings where fossil fuels are required for “specific needs that cannot practicably be served by heat pump.” Large commercial buildings in Eastern Washington, where the temperature can get down into the negative teens, are also allowed to use gas heating as a backup option. The code requires only that 50 percent of a building’s water heating needs are fulfilled using heat pumps.</p> <p>No state is yet considering a ban on the use of gas for cooking — though some of the local gas bans do apply to stoves. Kocher said the space and water-heating mandate is likely to prevent most commercial</p>

	<p>developers from hooking up new buildings to the gas system altogether. He also didn't want to invite further opposition to the idea by angering the restaurant industry, which has proved to be a fierce opponent to gas bans in places like Berkeley, California.</p> <p>"We do need to stop putting gas lines in for all end uses. But we thought that this was a pretty big code change as it is," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/11 Hard to get a job-robot recruiters to blame?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/may/11/artificial-intelligence-job-applications-screen-robot-recruiters
GIST	<p>Martin Burch had been working for the Wall Street Journal and its parent company Dow Jones for a few years and was looking for new opportunities. One Sunday in May 2021, he applied for a data analyst position at Bloomberg in London that looked like the perfect fit. He received an immediate response, asking him to take a digital assessment.</p> <p>It was strange. The assessment showed him different shapes and asked him to figure out the pattern. He started feeling incredulous. "Shouldn't we be testing my abilities on the job?" he asked himself.</p> <p>The next day, a Monday, which happened to be a public holiday in the UK, he got a rejection email. He decided to email a recruiter at Bloomberg. Maybe the company made a mistake?</p> <p>What Burch discovered offers insight into a larger phenomenon that is baffling experts: while there are record level job openings in both the UK and in the US, why do many people still have to apply to sometimes hundreds of jobs, even in sought-after fields like software development, while many companies complain they can't find the right talent?</p> <p>Some experts argue that algorithms and artificial intelligence now used extensively in hiring are playing a role. This is a huge shift, because until relatively recently, most hiring managers would handle applications and resumes themselves. Yet recent findings have shown that some of these new tools discriminate against women and use criteria unrelated to work to "predict" job success.</p> <p>While companies and vendors are not required to disclose if they use artificial intelligence or algorithms to select and hire job applicants, in my reporting I have learned that this is widespread. All the leading job platforms – including LinkedIn, ZipRecruiter, Indeed, CareerBuilder, and Monster – have told me they deploy some of these technologies.</p> <p>Ian Siegel, the CEO of ZipRecruiter, said that artificial intelligence and algorithms have already conquered the field. He estimates that at least three-quarters of all resumes submitted for jobs in the US are read by algorithms. "The dawn of robot recruiting has come and went and people just haven't caught up to the realization yet," he said.</p> <p>A 2021 survey of recruiting executives by the research and consulting firm Gartner found that almost all reported using AI for at least one part of the recruiting and hiring process.</p> <p>Yet it is not foolproof. One of the most consequential findings comes from Harvard Business School professor Joe Fuller, whose team surveyed more than 2,250 business leaders in the US, UK and Germany. Their motives for using algorithmic tools were efficiency and saving costs. Yet 88% of executives said that they know their tools reject qualified candidates.</p> <p>Despite the prevalence of the technology, there have just been a few famous cases of misfires. A few years back, Amazon discovered that its resume screener tool was biased against women. The algorithm was trained on resumes of current employees, who skewed male, reflecting a gender disparity in many tech fields. Over time, the tool picked up on male preferences and systematically downgraded people with the word "women" on their resumes, as in "women's chess club" or "women's soccer team."</p>

Amazon's engineers tried to fix the problem, but they couldn't and the company discontinued the tool in 2018.

"This project was only ever explored on a trial basis, and was always used with human supervision," said Amazon spokesperson Brad Glasser.

AI vendors that build these kinds of technologies say that algorithm-based tools democratize the hiring process by giving everyone a fair chance. If a company is drowning in applications, many human recruiters read only a fraction of the applications. An AI analyzes all of them and any assessments and judges every candidate the same way.

Another benefit, these vendors say, is if employers choose to focus on skills and not on educational achievements like college degrees, applicants from diverse backgrounds who are often overlooked can get to the next stage of the process.

"At the end of the day, we don't want people to be hired into roles that are going to drain them and not utilize their strengths. And so it's really not about rejecting people, it's about 'screening in' the right people," said Caitlin MacGregor, CEO of Plum, which built the assessment Burch found so puzzling. MacGregor said the company's clients have increased their diversity and retention rates since they started to use Plum. She said the assessments helped hone in on applicants' "potential".

But job candidates who have the necessary experience worry they're being unfairly weeded out when companies focus on elusive factors like potential or personality traits.

"This was the first time in my life, in my career, where I was sending out resumes and there was nothing," said Javier Alvarez, 57, a distribution and sales manager from Monrovia, California, who sent out his resume more than 300 times on sites like LinkedIn and Indeed for jobs he said he was qualified for. No job offer materialized, and he started to wonder if he was being automatically excluded in some way – perhaps because of his age or salary requirements. "I felt hopeless. I started to doubt my abilities."

Ronnie Riley, a 29-year-old event planner from Canada, had a gap of several years in their resume because of an illness. Riley applied to more than 100 event planning and some administrative assistant jobs in December 2021, and over 70 jobs in January, but ended up with a total of five interviews and no job offers. They worry the gap is the reason. "It just seems it's discounting a whole bunch of people that could be perfect for the job," they said.

Fuller's research has helped provide answers to how exactly automatic rejections occur. One reason, he found, is that too often, job descriptions include too many criteria and skills. Many employers add new skills and criteria to existing job descriptions, building a long list of requirements. Algorithms end up rejecting many qualified applicants who may be missing just a couple of skills from the list.

One executive Fuller spoke with said their company's tool has been rejecting qualified candidates because they scored low in one important category, even when they got a near perfect score in all the other important categories. The company found that it was left with job applicants who received mediocre scores across the board. (Longer job descriptions may also deter more female applicants, Fuller believes, since many women apply to jobs only when they fulfill most of the requirements.)

Another reason qualified candidates are rejected by automated systems are so-called knockout criteria. In Fuller's research, he found that almost 50% of the executives surveyed acknowledged that their automatic systems reject job applicants outright who have a work gap longer than six months on their resumes. These applicants never get in front of a hiring manager, even if they are the most qualified candidates for the job.

“The six month gap is a really insidious filter,” said Fuller, since it’s probably built on the assumption that a gap signifies something ominous, but may simply represent military deployments, pregnancy complications, caregiving obligations or illness.

Experts contacted by the Guardian also described automatic resume screeners making mistakes similar to the infamous Amazon example, rooted in learning biases from an existing dataset. This hints at how these programs could end up enforcing the kinds of racial and gender biases observed with other AI tools, such as facial recognition tech and algorithms used in health care.

John Scott is the chief operating officer of APMetrics, an organization that helps companies identify talent, and is often brought in by larger companies to check if new technologies the company wants to buy from a vendor are fair and legal. Scott has examined multiple resume screeners and recruiting tools and discovered problems in all of them. He found biased criteria unrelated to work, such as the name Thomas and the keyword church, to “predict” success in a job.

Mark Girouard, an employment lawyer in Minneapolis, found that the name Jared and having played lacrosse in high school were used as predictors of success in one system.

Martin Burch, the London jobseeker, discovered he had been weeded out in a different way.

He contacted a human recruiter at Bloomberg and asked her to look at his CV. His experience lined up with the job description and this was a direct competitor, making his background all the more valuable, he thought. But the problem turned out to be the pattern-finding and personality test he had taken, which was created by Plum.

A recruiter at Bloomberg replied: “I can see that your application was rejected due to not meeting our benchmark in the Plum assessment that you completed. Unfortunately on that basis we are not able to take your application any further.” Burch felt stunned that he had indeed been rejected by a piece of code.

He retained a lawyer, and in communications with Bloomberg asked for a human review of his application.

Bloomberg informed Burch that the role he applied for was no longer available and he wouldn’t be able to be considered for it.

Bloomberg did not return emails and calls asking for comment.

As adoption of AI tools in hiring expands, lawmakers are starting to take a closer look. In the UK, the government is planning new regulation of algorithmic decision making. In the US, a recent local law requires employers to inform job seekers how their application materials are screened by AI upon request. And congressional lawmakers have introduced bills that would regulate AI in hiring at a national level, including the Algorithmic Accountability Act of 2022, but have faced hurdles getting them passed.

Burch decided to file an official claim with the Information Commissioner’s Office, an independent organization that upholds privacy laws in the UK. In February the office reprimanded Bloomberg, writing: “From reviewing the information provided, it is our decision that there is more work for you to do. As such, we now expect you to take steps to address any outstanding issues with the individual.”

Burch has since accepted £8,000 (\$9,864) in compensation from the company. He says he also fought to demonstrate a point: “I am trying to prove to them that it’s probably weeding out good candidates so they should probably stop using it.”

Plum’s CEO Caitlin MacGregor declined to comment on Burch’s case directly, citing privacy concerns, but she stands behind her product: “I should not be interviewing somebody that is a 35, regardless of

	how much experience they have. There is somewhere else that they are going to be their own 95 [percent] match.”
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HEADLINE	05/10 Puget Sound noise pollution research
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/research-on-noise-pollution-in-puget-sound-underway
GIST	<p>SHORELINE, Wash. - It's a critical time for the endangered southern resident killer whales, and scientists are continuing their work to understand their hunting grounds.</p> <p>Two new calves have been spotted in the past two months: one with J-Pod, and more recently a calf was spotted with K-Pod, marking the first known baby within K-Pod in more than 10 years.</p> <p>Despite the positive news, experts say changes are needed to reverse the fortune of the endangered orcas. In fact, many calves in recent years have struggled to survive a full year.</p> <p>Scientists have long been tracking the decline of the southern residents' population. Three key issues have been identified: prey availability, contaminants in the water and noise pollution.</p> <p>That doesn't mean that we have a full picture of those issues – when it comes to noise pollution, there are a number of blind-spots. Simply put, it's hard to track the entirety of Puget Sound, let alone the Salish Sea as a whole.</p> <p>"It's dire," said Jason Wood, the managing director of SMRU Consulting. "I'm concerned, specifically about this population."</p> <p>The Salish Sea may look calm on the surface some days, but underwater, there is a symphony of engine noises ranging from cargo ships to ferries and recreational boats.</p> <p>Orcas – which use echolocation to hunt their prey – struggle to feed themselves as their hunting grounds become noisier.</p> <p>While transient killer whales – also known as Biggs Killer Whales – hunt larger marine mammals, the southern resident orcas feed on salmon. Chasing a single fish costs them a massive amount of energy, and given that a number of salmon species in Washington state are endangering themselves, noise compounds an already precarious situation.</p> <p>On Tuesday morning out on Sound Guardian, King County's research vessel, Wood was prepping to remove a series of hydrophones that have been recording audio near Shoreline since February. The initial data, including audio, was relayed via cellphone signals. The raw data removed this week will allow further analysis.</p> <p>"This is our little effort to stretch the clock out a little bit," said Wood. "We want to give them a chance to recover. Once we understand what's driving the soundscape better, we can help inform better mitigation strategies – is it one thing or another that's contributing the most noise pollution."</p> <p>Wood said he's hopeful that their data will inform programs like 'Quiet Sound,' a new collaborative program launched earlier this year that aims to cut down on noise pollution from large vessels in Puget Sound.</p> <p>Canada has a similar program that's already being implemented. ECHO, a voluntary program, has found success within the shipping industry. According to Wood, more than 80% of ships going to the Port of Vancouver are dropping speeds and re-routing when orcas are discovered in the area to reduce noise pollution.</p>

	Wood said that Canada is ahead of us, but that it could speed up the work in Washington, since many of the same industry players work on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border.
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HEADLINE	05/10 WMO: global temperature nears threshold
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/05/10/earth-climate-warming-threshold-wmo/
GIST	<p>Since signing the Paris climate agreement in 2015, nations around the world have focused on one climate goal: limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels this century. But as greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning have continued to increase, a new report from the World Meteorological Organization shows global temperatures could temporarily hit that threshold within the next five years.</p> <p>The WMO stated Monday there is a 50 percent chance that the annual global temperature will hit this mark by 2026. The probability is only increasing with time. In 2015, the chance of temporarily observing 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming was zero, underscoring the rapid pace of human-caused climate change.</p> <p>“A single year of exceedance above 1.5°C does not mean we have breached the iconic threshold of the Paris agreement, but it does reveal that we are edging ever closer to a situation where 1.5°C could be exceeded for an extended period,” Leon Hermanson, a researcher at Britain’s Met Office who led the report, said in a news release.</p> <p>The projection was calculated by climate scientists across the world and uses “the best prediction systems from leading climate centers,” Hermanson said, but some scientists are wary of the prediction.</p> <p>“Initialized decadal predictions (such as used here) don’t have a great track record (yet),” Gavin Schmidt, a climate scientist at NASA, wrote in an email. “While I’m happy that research continues the regional predictions are not to be taken too seriously.”</p> <p>Michael Mann, a climate scientist at Penn State, said that while global temperature readings may temporarily spike to the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold in the next several years, the real concern occurs when it is surpassed over a period of many years.</p> <p>“When we talk about the need to avoid 1.5 degrees Celsius global warming in a climate change context, we’re talking about the long-term trend, not the values for individual years,” he told Inside Climate News.</p> <p>Hitting 1.5 degrees Celsius for an extended period may not be far off. The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded last month that the world could blow past the key target within eight years. The assessment of 278 top climate experts wrote that while concerted action could avert this scenario, it “cannot be achieved through incremental change.”</p> <p>Staying under the threshold, the panel concluded, would involve a coordinated push to expand renewable energy production, revamp transportation networks, extract carbon from the air, and redesign how cities are built and farming is done.</p> <p>Scientists have long warned about the dangers of 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming on people and the environment. Extreme heat events are more likely to take place and break previous records by large margins, as seen in the Pacific Northwest in June. Hurricanes will unleash more damage, intensifying more rapidly and unleashing more rainfall in a warmer climate. Coral reefs as well as a number of animals species could vanish. Glaciers will continue to melt, raising global sea levels and flooding communities.</p> <p>Even if the world does not hit 1.5 degrees Celsius in the next five years, the report stated it is “very likely” (a 93 percent chance) that it will post its warmest year on record by 2026, knocking off 2016 from the top ranking. The next five years probably will also be warmer on average than the past five years, which have been some of the hottest on record.</p>

	<p>Natural weather patterns will play a key role in determining when annual global temperatures spike to a record level. For instance, the development of a powerful El Niño event, associated with warm waters in the tropical Pacific, helped fuel record temperatures in 2016. The planet’s temperature then shot up to its second-highest level in 2019 following a weaker El Niño.</p> <p>However, La Niña, the cyclical cooling of ocean waters in the tropical Pacific, has put the brakes on warming since then. After El Niño faded and La Niña developed in 2020 and 2021, temperatures plateaued. Those two years ranked as the second- (tied with 2019) and sixth-warmest on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).</p> <p>With the possibility of La Niña extending into a third straight year, NOAA says there’s only about a 40 percent chance 2022 finishes among the warmest five years on record, but it’s “virtually certain” it will still rank in the top 10.</p> <p>“We are very likely to exceed 1.5°C in the next decade or so but it doesn’t necessarily mean that we are committed to this in the long term — or that working to reduce further change is not worthwhile!” Schmidt wrote.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	05/10 CAO tough-on-crime plans for Seattle
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2022/05/city-attorney-ann-davison-her-tough-crime-plans-seattle
GIST	<p>Seattle City Attorney Ann Davison made clear on Saturday that her decision to not prosecute nearly 2,000 misdemeanor cases from the city’s backlog was a one-time thing.</p> <p>“We inherited a nearly 5,000-criminal-case backlog since before the pandemic,” said Davison. “We had to look at that and figure out how to move forward. ... It’s a one-time thing we had to do with a heavy heart.”</p> <p>Davison was speaking with former Seattle Times columnist Joni Balter at the Crosscut Festival’s May 7 session “Pushing Public Safety,” about crime in Seattle and Davison’s promise to be a hardliner as city attorney.</p> <p>Any city attorney’s announcement to drop 2,000 cases would be newsworthy. But Davison was elected last November with a tough-on-crime platform and had strongly criticized her opponent’s plan to not prosecute misdemeanors as an extremist view that would make the city less safe — something Davison’s critics jumped on when she announced the dropped cases.</p> <p>At the Crosscut Festival, Davison explained that dismissing the cases was necessary to clear up capacity so that her office can more quickly prosecute the misdemeanor cases referred by Seattle police (felonies get referred to the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office). Quick action, she said, will serve as more of a deterrent for crime.</p> <p>The current average response time from police referral to the City Attorney’s Office acting on a case is 334 days. Davison wants to get that down to five days under her “close-in-time” policy.</p> <p>“When there’s an action [of someone committing a crime], then the response doesn’t come for 334 days later, there isn’t a connection to those two events. For it to mean something for someone, you need to have a response right away,” said Davison.</p> <p>In addition to speeding up her office’s response time, Davison plans to target repeat offenders. Calling it the “High Utilizer Initiative,” the city attorney has identified 118 individuals responsible for 2,400 criminal cases over the past five years in Seattle.</p>

Davison framed a focus on repeat offenders as not only an important tactic for reducing crime in the city, but as a chance to intervene in offenders' lives.

“There are people stuck in a form of human suffering that we’ve just ignored and allowed to continue in their own self-destructive behavior,” she said. “We have not seized the opportunity. When we come in contact with them, we have to start to change the pattern for them.”

King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg has expressed skepticism that the courts are an intervention that will change behaviors. [Satterberg told KUOW](#), “I think it can give the neighborhood a break, I think it can give the store a break if the person is a frequent shoplifter. But in terms of long-term outcomes for people with serious behavioral health issues, the court doesn’t have any magic in its toolbox.”

Davison wasn’t the only Seattle politician elected last November who focused on crime and policing. Seattle City Councilmember Sarah Nelson has made police hiring a centerpiece of her work. Mayor [Bruce Harrell has said he wants](#) to hire more police, but ensure they have better anti-bias and de-escalation training.

Balter asked Davison whether she supports Harrell’s vision for hiring “the right kind of officer.”

Davison demurred, saying that police hiring was the executive’s prerogative. Pressed by Balter for an answer about Harrell’s “right kind of officer,” Davison said, “I think it’s important we have people understanding what the landscape is. I’m not sure there’s a strict definition of what the word right means. ... I think that [being sensitive to racial justice issues] is important for all of us, officers or human beings all together.”

In a [recent Crosscut/Elway Poll](#) of Seattle voters, a majority of respondents said prioritizing police hiring and prosecuting misdemeanors would reduce crime. But those approaches ranked sixth and seventh out of seven potential solutions. Voters ranked addiction and mental health services, de-escalation training and more social programs highest for solutions to reduce crime.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Anti-Semitic crimes surging in Germany
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/88gy34/germany-antisemitic-crimes-covid
GIST	<p>Antisemitic crimes surged by nearly 30 percent in Germany last year, security officials revealed on Tuesday, amid warnings from a senior Jewish community leader that the pandemic was acting as an “accelerant, radicalising a frighteningly large proportion of the population.”</p> <p>The latest Interior Ministry statistics showed that politically motivated crime had reached its highest level in Germany since officials started tracking the data in 2001. Overall, politically motivated offending – from hate speech to murder – increased by nearly a quarter from the previous year to 55,048 offences, including 3,889 violent crimes, a 16 percent increase from 2020.</p> <p>As in previous years, the far-right remained Germany’s greatest extremist threat, accounting for nearly 22,000 politically-motivated crimes – although this was a slight drop from previous years. Four in ten victims of politically-motivated violence had been targeted by right-wing extremists, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said, calling the far-right “the greatest extremist threat to people in our country.”</p> <p>But the overall rise in political crime was primarily down to a huge spike in offending that the ministry said couldn’t be attributed to traditional categories of far-right, far-left or Islamist extremism, with a large proportion of this new type of offending linked to the COVID conspiracy scene. Such “non-assignable” crimes now accounted for nearly 40 percent of all politically-motivated offending – an increase of 147 percent since the previous year.</p> <p>One of the worst such crimes, Faeser noted, was the murder in September of a 20-year-old petrol station employee in the town of Idar-Oberstein by a customer who he had asked to wear a face mask.</p>

Meanwhile, antisemitic crimes had surged by 29 percent to a peak of 3,027 offences, a development which Faeser said “worries me the most.” Of these antisemitic crimes, more than 80 percent were committed by right-wing extremists, and about half were linked to the COVID conspiracist scene.

Experts say that the pandemic has been a massively radicalising force in Germany, giving rise to a volatile COVID-conspiracist scene with a strong far-right element, who promulgated conspiracy theories that typically scapegoated Jews and pushed age-old antisemitic ideas.

Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said in a statement that the rise in antisemitic offending was “deeply worrying,” and that the statistics confirmed “what many had feared.” “The corona pandemic is acting like an accelerant, radicalising a frighteningly large proportion of the population,” he said.

In one horrific case in Königs Wusterhausen in the northeast state of Brandenburg in December, a radical anti-vaxxer who believed in the conspiracy theory of a Jewish-led global world order [killed his wife and three children](#) before killing himself.

German anti-extremism group the Amadeu Antonio Foundation took issue with the government’s reporting of the figures, saying they did not capture the strong overlap between the far-right and the COVID conspiracy scene and only told “a part of the story.”

“The alarming spike in crimes that fall into the de-politicised ‘unassignable’ is largely a result of protests against COVID measures, which are in reality far-right at their core and must be named as such,” Nicholas Potter, a researcher for the organisation, told VICE World News.

“The COVID-denier and anti-vax movement is deeply intertwined with the violent far-right,” he said. “The number of right-wing crimes should therefore actually be much higher.”

His criticism echoed that made by German politicians, including Martina Renner, deputy leader of The Left, who said she believed that right-wing extremists were responsible for most of the crimes that the police have not yet been able to identify.

“There is a lack of willingness to admit that the numbers in the area of politically right-wing motivated crime should actually be almost twice as high – and have therefore actually exploded,” she tweeted. She added that the fact that even the Idar-Oberstein gas station murder, which she said was rooted in “anti-Semitic conspiracy myths,” was not classified as a far-right crime was “an intolerable situation.”

Potter said much of the COVID conspiracist scene – known in Germany as the “Querdenken,” or “lateral thinkers” movement – echoed the demands of the conspiracy-driven sovereign citizens movement, which itself had a far-right core. Despite its claims, the movement offered little legitimate criticism of the government’s pandemic regulations, and instead pushed radical, anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.

He continued: “Having a category of politically-motivated crime that supposedly cannot be attributed to any political ideology is an oxymoron. The fact that the authorities are seemingly unable to politically analyse such a sizeable chunk of political crimes is worrying.”

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HEADLINE	05/10 Former Black Panther prison release
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/10/sundiata-acoli-black-panthers-released-prison
GIST	<p>Sundiata Acoli, 85, the oldest former member of the Black Panthers still to be incarcerated for acts of violence during the 1970s Black liberation struggle, is finally to be released from prison after the New Jersey supreme court ruled that he was no longer a risk to public safety.</p> <p>Acoli has been held captive for more than 49 years for the May 1973 shooting of New Jersey state trooper Werner Foerster. He was found guilty the following year and sentenced to life plus 24 to 35 years.</p>

The supreme court [noted in its ruling](#) that under the terms of his sentence, Acoli first became eligible for parole 29 years ago. On each occasion that he came before the panel his release was denied.

Yet for more than a quarter of a century his prison record has been “exemplary”, the judges said. He had completed 120 courses while in prison, participated in counseling, had a constructive rapport with prison staff and fellow inmates, and had positive evaluations from prison officials.

Twelve years ago, a state-assigned psychologist assessed Acoli’s progress in prison and concluded that he was deeply remorseful for Foerster’s death and that it was “time to seriously consider him for parole”. Despite that, his parole was denied; in his latest parole hearing he was still being classified a potential danger to society.

The parole board had “lost sight that its mission largely was to determine the man Acoli had become”, the supreme court judges concluded. It added that his age, at 85, was another important factor that the board had failed to consider given that elderly people released from prison have extremely low rates of reoffending.

Acoli, whose given name was Clark Edward Squire, was involved in an encounter with Foerster and another state trooper, James Harper, on 2 May 1973 after the car he was in was stopped on the New Jersey Turnpike for a broken taillight. He was traveling with two other members of the Black Liberation Army, Assata Shakur (previously JoAnne Chesimard) and Zayd Malik Shakur (James Costan).

In the ensuing melee, shots were fired, killing Foerster and Shakur. Harper was wounded and Acoli and Assata Shakur, also wounded, were arrested after a police chase.

In his defense, Acoli said that he was shot in the crossfire and had blacked out. When he came to, he found Foerster’s body on the ground nearby.

Acoli was one of [at least 12 former members](#) of the Black Panthers and their armed wing, the Black Liberation Army, who are still in prison. Many are now approaching, or exceeding, half a century behind bars.

Last year Acoli wrote to the Guardian, describing himself as an old man “who’s been imprisoned since age 36 for almost 50 years, who now poses a threat not even to a flea, let alone public safety. My sentence is obviously too long. I am rapidly disintegrating before my family and friends’ eyes.”

Soffiyah Elijah, a civil rights attorney and a lead advocate for Acoli, said that it was time now for him “to live the rest of his life in the loving care of his family and community”. She added that she hoped his release would bring attention “to the thousands of elders like him trapped in the New Jersey prison system”.

Though Acoli’s release brings to a conclusion one of the unfinished stories of the Black Panther era, in another regard the narrative remains unresolved. After her arrest alongside Acoli in 1973, Assata Shakur escaped and fled to Cuba, where she has been granted asylum by the Cuban government.

She remains on [the FBI’s most wanted list](#) as a “domestic terrorist”, with a \$2m reward on offer for information that leads to her capture.

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HEADLINE	05/10 Arizona: 29 arrests; child sex crimes sting
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/operation-aprils-fools-arizona-authorities-arrest-29-men-in-undercover-child-sex-crimes-sting
GIST	PHOENIX - Police say 29 men were arrested in connection to an undercover operation targeting child sex crimes and human trafficking in Arizona .

"Operation April's Fools" resulted in the [arrest](#) of suspects soliciting various sex acts, the Phoenix Police Department said on May 10.

"We had detectives placing ads, posing as underage victims that you could come to solicit a sex act from," explained Phoenix Police Sgt. Andy Williams. "So in this case, no actual victims."

The operation consisted of law enforcement members from ten different agencies, local, state and federal, to lure in dozens of would-be child sex offenders and human traffickers.

"We are seeing legitimate victims every day of this underage sexual conduct with a minor, human trafficking, so I think it's just looking at the problem holistically and attacking it from every angle," Williams said.

Operations like this work to stop sexual predators in their tracks before they can turn another child into a victim.

"For so long, we've seen child sex victims be called "child prostitutes," said Daphne Young, chief communications officer at [Childhelp](#). "We've seen kids suffer in silence."

She says the organization is constantly helping kids recover who've experienced this type of trauma. It's a growing problem not just in Phoenix, but nationwide.

"Our hotline has seen such an increase during the pandemic related to child trafficking and people reaching out online. It doesn't surprise me that they were able to catch so many people so fast," Young said.

As for the news of the success of this operation, Daphne says she's thrilled.

"I am thrilled that our law enforcement is not only catching the predators but publishing their names," she said.

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Click on source link to view Phoenix PD media release identifying charges, arrests and suspects

HEADLINE	05/10 Sheriff: inmate, jailer prepared for shootout
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/alabama-jailbreak-mystery/507-44144a36-d10c-451f-bacc-5661435579de
GIST	<p>The murder suspect and his jailer who evaded authorities for more than a week after walking out of an Alabama lockup were carrying \$29,000 in cash, four handguns and an AR-15 rifle and were prepared for a shootout when they were captured, an Indiana sheriff said Tuesday.</p> <p>The escaped convict Casey White showed no remorse over the death of jail official Vicky White, who was found mortally wounded with a gun in her hand on Monday after a brief car chase, Vanderburgh County Sheriff Dave Wedding said. Authorities don't believe Casey White shot Vicky White, but a coroner will make the final determination, he said.</p> <p>Casey White, 38, surrendered without a fight, saying he didn't kill the woman he called his wife. He appeared by video Tuesday in an Indiana courtroom where he waived extradition, and authorities said he'll be swiftly sent back to Alabama.</p> <p>The end of the manhunt did little to answer lingering questions surrounding the jailbreak: Why would a long-respected jail official on the eve of her retirement give up everything to help a dangerous felon escape? What did they do while they evaded authorities for roughly eleven days? And when they were finally surrounded, did she really pull the trigger to end her own life?</p>

Vicky White, 56, was pronounced dead at a hospital on Monday after the Cadillac she was driving was pushed by U.S. Marshals task force members into a ditch where it ended up on its side, the sheriff in Evansville, Indiana said. They were nearly 300 miles (480 kilometers) from the Alabama jail where he had been awaiting trial for capital murder.

An attorney representing White in that case, Jamy Poss, declined comment Tuesday, saying he was still trying to find out what had happened in Indiana.

NBC's "Today" show reported Tuesday that federal marshals said Casey White told officers at the scene, "Please help my wife. She just shot herself in the head and I didn't do it." The two Whites were not related, let alone married, officials said.

Before Vanderburgh County Coroner Steve Lockyear announced her death, the sheriff in Alabama had said he hoped to get answers from his once trusted jail employee.

"I had every bit of trust in Vicky White. She has been an exemplary employee. What in the world provoked her, prompted her to pull a stunt like this? I don't know. I don't know if we'll ever know," Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said.

Authorities closed in after the manager of a car wash said he told U.S. Marshals on Sunday that a man closely resembling Casey White had been recorded by a surveillance camera getting out of a 2006 Ford F-150 pickup truck. White stands 6 feet, 9 inches (2.06 meters) tall and weighs about 260 pounds (118 kilograms).

After locating the F-150, authorities got information that the two may have then gotten into a beige 2006 Cadillac, U.S. Marshal Marty Keely told "Good Morning America."

"We dispatched our people into the area of the car wash and observed the vehicle at a hotel," Keely said.

Members of a U.S. Marshals task force went to investigate, leading to a brief chase, Vanderburgh County Sheriff Dave Wedding said on "Today."

"The pursuit was very short. It went up a major artery here in Vanderburgh County and they cut across a parking lot at a large factory. They were in a grassy area so three of our task force members actually rammed the vehicle, pushed it into a ditch so it ended up on its side. As they approached the vehicle it was obvious that the female driver was unconscious and still had a weapon in her hand. And they removed the murderer from the vehicle simultaneously," Wedding said.

Wedding said it has not been officially determined that Vicky White did in fact take her own life.

"The coroner's office will do an investigation and they will determine if it was a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The initial indication is that it was, but we won't rule anything out until we have a thorough investigation by the coroner."

The manhunt began April 29 after Vicky White, the assistant director of corrections for the jail in Lauderdale County, told co-workers she was taking Casey White, who was awaiting trial in a capital murder case, from the jail for a mental health evaluation. There was no such appointment.

"We got a dangerous man off the street today. He is never going to see the light of day again. That is a good thing, for not just our community. That's a good thing for our country," Singleton said.

Casey White was serving a 75-year prison sentence for attempted murder and other charges at the time of his escape. He was awaiting trial in the stabbing of a 58-year-old woman during a burglary in 2015. If convicted, he could face the death penalty. White will be returned to Lauderdale County in Alabama where he'll be arraigned on the latest charges, authorities said.

	Federal and local law enforcement officials also learned Casey White threatened to kill his former girlfriend and his sister in 2015 and said “that he wanted police to kill him,” the Marshals Service said.
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HEADLINE	05/10 New federal public defender western WA
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/attorney-who-led-effort-to-dismantle-fbi-child-porn-site-named-federal-public-defender-in-western-wa/
GIST	<p>A federal defense attorney who coordinated a national effort to dismantle a FBI-run child-pornography site whose operation was deemed “outrageous misconduct” has been named federal public defender in Western Washington by judges of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.</p> <p>Colin Fieman, 57, replaces Mike Filipovic, who retired in February after a 31-year career as a federal defender in Washington, the past eight as the office’s appointed leader.</p> <p>Fieman began his four-year term as head of the Federal Public Defender’s Office last week.</p> <p>“Colin Fieman has more than 23 years of experience serving indigent defendants and has a stellar reputation within the legal community,” said Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw, who chairs the San Francisco-based appeals court’s Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders. “We are confident he will continue the office’s tradition of zealous and compassionate advocacy established by his predecessors.”</p> <p>Fieman, a New Yorker who graduated from Haverford College in Pennsylvania and Columbia Law School, began his legal career in 1990 as an assistant New York district attorney in Manhattan. He also worked on the New York City Commission to Combat Police Corruption, as a federal defender in the Federated States of Micronesia and as a staff attorney for the University of Georgia Law School’s Legal Aid Clinic.</p> <p>Fieman joined the Federal Public Defender’s Office in Western Washington in 2002 and has represented clients charged with a range of federal felonies. In 2016, he caught a case involving a trio of clients who had been charged with possessing child pornography as part of an international FBI sting and computer hacking operation called “Operation Pacifier.”</p> <p>Fieman led a national group of federal defenders and others who challenged accusations against more than 200 people facing charges as part of “Operation Pacifier,” accusing the FBI of seizing and then operating a dark-web child pornography site that was used to hack into the computers of suspected porn users. The cases raised significant questions about internet privacy and entrapment, and U.S. District Judge Robert Bryan concluded the FBI’s actions constituted “outrageous misconduct.”</p> <p>Fieman was named the office’s senior litigator in 2017, and he’s a faculty member of the National Criminal Defense College.</p> <p>“I am honored by this appointment and thoroughly committed to improving the lives of our clients,” Fieman said in a statement. “I look forward to working with the court, the U.S. Attorney’s Office and other stakeholders to advance our criminal justice system and enhance community safety through alternatives to incarceration.”</p> <p>The Federal Public Defender’s Office in Western Washington has 55 employees, including attorneys, paralegals, investigators and administrators. It handled more than 1,100 cases last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 DEA zeroes in on China: fentanyl deaths
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fentanyl-china-mexico-drug-enforcement-administration/
GIST	The leading cause of death for Americans between 18 and 45 isn't COVID-19 or car accidents — it's fentanyl overdoses. With a majority of the chemicals in fentanyl produced in China, the Drug Enforcement

Administration is now calling on the Chinese government to crack down on the supply chain networks producing the illegal drug.

"We would like China to do more," DEA administrator Anne Milgram told CBS News. "For example, we need to be able to track every shipment of chemicals that's coming out of those Chinese chemical companies and coming to Mexico. Right now, we can't do that."

To stop fentanyl from getting into counterfeit drugs, the DEA is focusing on what's called precursor chemicals — the ingredients needed to make fentanyl. Milgram said the materials are made in China then shipped to Mexican cartels before arriving at the U.S. border.

The DEA has seized 2,100 pounds of precursor chemicals from January 2021 to March 2022, Milgram said. It's enough to make one billion potentially lethal doses, but Milgram knows her agency is not getting all of it.

"This is what we worry about," she said. "That's part of why we are so focused right now on stopping the chemicals coming out of the Chinese chemical companies. If we can go as far upstream as possible to China, we have a much better chance of stopping it ever being made in Mexico."

Milgram said Chinese chemical companies are currently the largest producer of precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl.

"There's a relationship between these Chinese chemical companies and the criminal cartels in Mexico," she said.

Milgram said that once the drugs make it to the border, "it is too late."

"I can say with 100% assurance that the criminal drug cartels in Mexico will stop at nothing to get fentanyl into the United States," she said.

Fentanyl's threat to teens is also a concern because of how easily fentanyl-laced drugs can be bought online, Milgram said. Three quarters of teen overdose deaths in 2021 involved fentanyl, according to [a study](#) published in JAMA in April.

"We know that these fake counterfeit prescription pills are widely available on social media," Milgram said. "If your child is on TikTok or Snapchat or Instagram or Facebook, drug dealers can access them there. And that — it's almost like Uber Eats, being able right now in America to get a fake pill delivered to your doorstep."

"There's no question that within one or two clicks on a social media app, teens are ordering these drugs," she said. "By and large, they're not going out looking for fentanyl. They're looking for a Xanax or an Adderall or an Oxy thinking they're gonna get a prescription pill. They're not thinking at all that they're gonna get a pill that contains fentanyl."

Four of 10 pills seized last year contained a deadly dose — 2 milligrams or more — of fentanyl, she said. "The amount that could be on the tip of a pencil is enough to kill someone," Milgram said.

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HEADLINE	05/09 FBI: law enforcement officers killed on duty
SOURCE	https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/press-releases/fbi-releases-2021-statistics-on-law-enforcement-officers-killed-in-the-line-of-duty
GIST	According to statistics reported to the FBI, 129 law enforcement officers were killed in line-of-duty incidents in 2021. Of these, 73 officers died as a result of felonious acts, and 56 officers died in accidents.

Comprehensive data tables about these incidents and brief narratives describing the fatal attacks were released today in the Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) portion on the [FBI's Law Enforcement Data Explorer \(a subset of the Crime Data Explorer\)](#).

Felonious Deaths

Seventy-three officers were feloniously killed in 2021, an increase of 27 when compared to the 46 officers who were killed as a result of criminal acts in 2020. The 73 felonious deaths occurred in 28 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The 5- and 10-year comparisons show an increase of 27 felonious deaths when compared with the 2017 figure (46 officers) and an increase of 24 deaths when compared with 2012 data (49 officers).

Officer Profiles. The average age of the officers who were feloniously killed was 39 years old. The victim officers had served in law enforcement for an average of 12 years at the times of the fatal incidents. Of the 73 officers:

- 68 were male.
- 5 were female.
- 60 were White.
- 9 were Black/African American.
- The race of 4 officers who died was not reported.

Circumstances Encountered by Victim Officer Upon Arrival at Scene of Incident. Of the 73 officers feloniously killed:

- 24 officers were killed in unprovoked attacks.
- 9 officers died as a result of investigative/enforcement activities.
 - 4 were involved in surveillance activities.
 - 2 were conducting traffic violation stops.
 - 1 was responding to an active shooter.
 - 1 was involved in an undercover situation.
- 1 was investigating a wanted person.
- 8 officers were ambushed (entrapment/premeditation).
- 8 officers were involved in pursuits.
 - 7 were vehicular (anything other than on foot).
 - 1 was on foot.
- 7 officers responded to disorders/disturbances.
 - 3 were responding to a disturbance (disorderly subject, fight, etc.).
 - 2 were responding to domestic disturbances (family quarrel, no assault).
 - 2 were responding to domestic violence situations.
- 6 officers were involved in tactical situations.
 - 4 were involved in barricaded/hostage situations.
 - 2 were serving/attempting to serve arrest warrants.
- 4 officers were involved in arrest situations.
 - 2 were involved with verbal advisements only.
 - 1 was maintaining custody of a prisoner (in vehicle, precinct, etc.).
 - 1 arrest situation type was not reported.
- 2 officers responded to crimes in progress.
 - 1 was an active shooter.
 - 1 was an assault.
- 1 officer was assisting other law enforcement officers.
- 1 was serving/attempting to serve a court order (eviction notice, subpoena, etc.).
- 1 officer was out of service (court, dining, etc.).
- 1 officer was responding to a report of crime.
- 1 officer was providing/deploying equipment (flares, traffic cones, etc.).

Weapons. Offenders used firearms to kill 61 of the 73 victim officers. Six officers were killed with vehicles used as weapons. Four officers were killed by the offender's use of personal weapons (hand, fists, feet, etc.). Of the 61 officers killed by firearms:

- 15 were slain with handguns.
- 11 with rifles.
- 2 with shotguns.
- 33 with firearms in which the types of firearms were unknown or not reported.

Regions. Felonious deaths were reported in three of the four U.S. regions.

- 44 officers were feloniously killed in the South.
- 13 in the West.
- 12 in the Midwest.
- None were feloniously killed in the Northeast.
- 4 officers were also killed in Puerto Rico.

Suspects. Law enforcement agencies identified 66 alleged assailants in connection with the felonious line-of-duty deaths.

- 20 of the assailants had prior criminal arrests.
- 9 of the offenders were under judicial supervision at the times of the felonious incidents.

Accidental Deaths

Fifty-six law enforcement officers were killed accidentally while performing their duties in 2021, an increase of 10 when compared with the 46 officers accidentally killed in 2020. The majority (32 officers) were killed in motor vehicle crashes.

Officer Profile. The average age of officers who were accidentally killed was 40 years old; the average number of years the victim officers had served in law enforcement was 10. Of the 56 officers accidentally killed:

- 52 were male.
- 4 were female.
- 46 were White.
- 7 were Black/African American.
- 1 was Asian.
- The race for 2 victim officers was not reported.

Circumstances. The 56 officers accidentally killed died in a variety of scenarios:

- 32 died as a result of motor vehicle crashes.
 - 30 while operating motor vehicles.
 - 2 while operating an ATV or a motorcycle.
- 20 were pedestrian officers struck by vehicles.
- 4 officers drowned.

Use of seatbelts. Of the 30 officers killed in motor vehicle crashes (not including ATVs and motorcycles), 7 were wearing seatbelts, and 5 were not. Data about seatbelt usage was not reported for 18 of the officers.

Regions. Accidental deaths were reported in all four U.S. regions and in Puerto Rico.

- 26 of the accidental deaths occurred in the South.
- 13 in the West.
- 9 in the Midwest.
- 7 in the Northeast.
- 1 in Puerto Rico.

Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 2021 Release Schedule

To provide a more timely release of data to the public, today's release provides three categories of data. These categories include data and statistics concerning officers feloniously and accidentally killed and statistics about federal officers killed and/or assaulted. The remaining portions of the information, which

	present data reported to the FBI concerning law enforcement officers assaulted in the line of duty in 2021, will be released in the fall.
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HEADLINE	05/10 US charges 3rd man Haiti assassination plot
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/third-man-charged-connection-plot-kill-haitian-president
GIST	<p>A Haitian citizen was extradited from Jamaica to the United States on Friday to face criminal charges in the Southern District of Florida related to his alleged involvement in the assassination of the former President of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse, on July 7, 2021.</p> <p>Joseph Joel John, 51, made his initial court appearance this afternoon before U.S. Magistrate Judge Lauren Louis, who sits in Miami.</p> <p>John is charged with conspiring to commit murder or kidnapping outside the United States and providing material support resulting in death, knowing or intending that such material support would be used to prepare for or carry out the conspiracy to kill or kidnap. John is the third individual to be charged and arrested in the United States for his role in the assassination plot. The other men charged are Mario Antonio Palacios, 43, and Rodolphe Jaar, 49, who were both arrested earlier this year.</p> <p>As alleged in the complaint, which was unsealed today, John and others – including approximately 20 Colombian citizens and a number of dual Haitian-American citizens – participated in a plot to kidnap or kill the Haitian President. As alleged, John was present when a co-conspirator (Co-Conspirator #1) secured the signature of a former Haitian judge on a written request for assistance to further the arrest and imprisonment of President Moïse, as well as purporting to provide Haitian immunity for such actions. According to the complaint, on June 28, 2021, Co-Conspirator #1, a dual Haitian-American citizen, traveled from Haiti to the United States in furtherance of the conspiracy and provided other individuals with the document, and flew from Florida back to Haiti on July 1, 2021, to participate in the operation against the president.</p> <p>As alleged in the complaint, while the plot initially focused on conducting a kidnapping of the Haitian President as part of a purported arrest operation, it ultimately resulted in a plot to kill the President. The complaint alleges that on July 7, 2021, various co-conspirators entered President Moïse’s residence in Haiti with the intent and purpose of killing him, and in fact the President was killed.</p> <p>As alleged in the complaint, John helped to obtain vehicles and attempted to obtain firearms to support the operation against the president. It is also alleged that John attended a meeting with certain co-conspirators on or about July 6, 2021, after which many of the co-conspirators embarked on the mission to kill President Moïse.</p> <p>Co-conspirator #1 was subsequently arrested by Haitian authorities and remains in custody in Haiti. John was arrested in Jamaica pursuant to the United States’ provisional arrest request to the Government of Jamaica for John’s extradition. On April 28, the Minister of Justice of Jamaica signed the order granting the extradition request, resulting in John’s arrival in Miami last week. John is currently in the custody of U.S. law enforcement.</p> <p>If convicted of the charges in the complaint, John faces a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.</p> <p>Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division, U.S. Attorney Juan Antonio Gonzalez for the Southern District of Florida and Special Agent in Charge George Piro of the FBI’s Miami Field Office made the announcement.</p> <p>The FBI is investigating the case with other law enforcement partners, with valuable assistance provided by HSI.</p>

HEADLINE	05/10 US charges Haiti gang leader in kidnapping
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/haitian-gang-leader-charged-in-kidnapping-of-16-us-missionaries
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON - Federal prosecutors in the U.S. have charged the leader of a notoriously violent Haitian gang in connection with the kidnapping of 16 Americans last year, the Justice Department said Tuesday.</p> <p>Joly Germaine, 29, who is also known as "Yonyon," is accused of leading the 400 Mawozo gang and is the first person charged by Justice Department prosecutors with having any involvement in the kidnapping of the Christian missionaries. He was extradited to the U.S. last week and faces separate charges in a firearms trafficking case, prosecutors said.</p> <p>The indictment says Germaine was in a Haitian prison during the kidnapping but was nonetheless able to direct his group's operations, including ransom negotiations for the captives' release. One of the stated goals of the hostage-taking was to get the Haitian government to release Germaine from prison, prosecutors said.</p> <p>A total of 17 people from the missionary group — 12 adults and five minors — were abducted Oct. 16 shortly after visiting an orphanage in Ganthier, in the Croix-des-Bouquets area, the group has said. The group included 16 Americans and one Canadian.</p> <p>Twelve of the captive missionaries escaped during a daring overnight caper, eluding their kidnappers and walking for miles over difficult, moonlit terrain with an infant and other children in tow. The group navigated by stars to reach safety after a two-month kidnapping ordeal, according to officials with the Christian Aid Ministries, the Ohio-based agency that the missionaries work for.</p> <p>Their captors from the 400 Mawozo gang initially demanded millions of dollars in ransom. Five other captives had earlier reached freedom. It is still unclear if any ransom was paid. The 12 hostages who escaped were flown to Florida on a U.S. Coast Guard flight, and later reunited with the five hostages who had been released earlier.</p> <p>Germaine is due to make his first court appearance Wednesday. It was not immediately clear if he had a lawyer to comment on his behalf.</p> <p>"This case shows that the Justice Department will be relentless in our efforts to track down anyone who kidnaps a U.S. citizen abroad," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. "We will utilize the full reach of our law enforcement authorities to hold accountable anyone responsible for undermining the safety of Americans anywhere in the world."</p>
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HEADLINE	05/10 AG: incomplete sex offender DNA database
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/thousands-of-sex-offenders-never-submitted-dna-to-state-database-ag-says
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - More than half a dozen convicted sex offenders in our state are under criminal investigation for crimes they may have committed after serving their sentence.</p> <p>Offenders are required by law to provide a DNA sample upon release, but thousands never complied. The data is supposed to be entered into CODIS, the Combined DNA Index System, used by law enforcement agencies to track down criminal suspects.</p> <p>But, some convicted offenders never served time behind bars, so their samples were never collected. Others died before DNA data was ever gathered. Now, the state Attorney General's office is poring over cases and sparking new investigations.</p> <p>"It may be justice denied, but it's going to happen," said Bob Ferguson on Tuesday.</p>

He said his team has gone through thousands of sex offender convictions reaching back to 2002.

"The problem had become so large, the backlog so massive, no one law enforcement agency has the resources to address this," he said.

Ferguson says his team brought 372 convicted sex offenders into compliance with the law. Because of that effort, eight offenders' DNA profiles were matched to pieces of evidence already in the state database. Another three unsolved sex offenses are now under criminal investigation in our state, and three more are implicated in crimes beyond Washington's borders. Another two offenders were found to have already been confirmed as suspects, or convicted for new crimes.

"I found out there were 40 violent predators on McNeil Island that never had their DNA collected," said retired police detective Lindsey Wade, who encountered the problem about a decade ago.

"How do you figure out how many people in Washington State owe DNA? It's not an easy question to answer," said Wade.

That's a question Ferguson and his team hope to answer, to bring closure for families suffering long after their trauma.

"I can't go back in time 20 years and start the process, but I can work with our team and collect the owed DNA," said Ferguson. "We need to make sure this isn't occurring in the future."

Grants from United States Department of Justice makes this work possible, Ferguson explained.

The agency continues working on cases surrounding sex offenders and will move on to other violent offenders. More information about those cases might be released this summer.

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HEADLINE	05/10 FBI arrests fugitive Auburn couple
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/fbi-arrests-auburn-couple-sought-for-skipping-sentencing-in-30m-gold-scheme/
GIST	<p>The FBI has arrested a fugitive Auburn couple who fled on the eve of their sentencing last month after being convicted of operating a Ponzi-like scheme through the now-bankrupt Northwest Territorial Mint in Federal Way, defrauding thousands of investors out of more than \$30 million.</p> <p>Seattle FBI spokesperson Steve Bernd said Bernard Ross Hansen, 61, and his partner, 49-year-old Diane Renee Erdmann, were arrested Tuesday afternoon at a motel near Chimacum, outside of Port Townsend, after a hotel employee recognized them from photographs that had been published in the media.</p> <p>Hansen, president of the mint, and Erdmann, who was a manager of the business, were scheduled to appear April 29 in U.S. District Court after a jury convicted them of mail and wire fraud in a gold bullion scheme that prosecutors say victimized 3,000 investors.</p> <p>Hansen had been convicted of 14 federal felonies. Erdmann, described in court documents as the mint's "vault manager," faced sentencing on 13 counts. They failed to show up for their sentencing hearing, and the FBI issued warrants for their arrests, saying they were traveling in a small car with their dog.</p> <p>The mint — which made coins and medallions and bought, sold and stored precious metals — by 2012 didn't have enough assets to cover customer orders, according to the couple's indictment. Prosecutors allege Hansen and Erdmann started using the investments from new customers to pay money owed to older customers in an illegal Ponzi-like scheme.</p>

The mint, which also had offices in Auburn, sought bankruptcy protection in 2016 after Hansen and the company were hit with a record \$38.3 million civil verdict in a defamation and invasion of privacy lawsuit brought in Nevada by a Los Angeles businessman.

A grand jury indicted Hansen and Erdmann in 2018 on charges that alleged the pair lied about gold and silver bullion shipments while using investors' money for personal luxuries and expenses — and to expand their business and draw in new victims.

In a defense sentencing memorandum filed last month, Hansen's defense attorney, Angelo Calfo, argued that Hansen lived a humble lifestyle and was motivated not by greed but by responsibility. Calfo said that despite operating a multimillion-dollar company, Hansen lived in a modest home and wore "the same humble shirts and jeans each day."

The indictment claimed that more than 50 people who had stored their precious metals at the mint's Federal Way and Auburn offices found \$4.9 million in bullion missing. Twenty customers involved in a "bullion-leasing program" were defrauded of an additional \$5 million, according to the indictment.

The indictment also alleges Hansen and Erdmann stole \$1 million more from a Canadian silver-bullion producer.

Federal prosecutors, in sentencing recommendations submitted to the court before the couple's April sentencing hearing, had recommended that Hansen serve at least 15 years in prison and be ordered to pay \$33 million in restitution. Prosecutors planned to ask the judge to sentence Erdmann to 7½ years in prison.

Hansen has previous convictions for possessing a machine gun and failing to report a financial transaction of more than \$10,000. Erdmann does not have a previous criminal record.

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